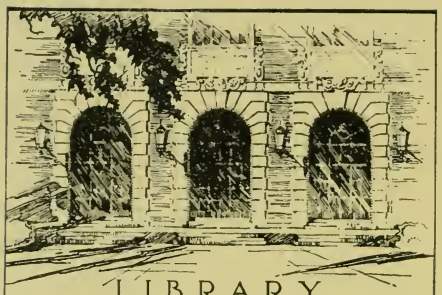

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MARJORY:

A Study.

MARJORY:

A STUDY.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "JAMES GORDON'S WIFE."

— Do not fear to hope! Can poet's brain
More than the father's heart rich good invent?
* * * * * *
Be bounteous in thy faith, for not misspent
Is confidence unto the Father lent.

GEORGE MACDONALD.

VOLUME III.

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MARJORY.

CHAPTER I.

"O my own Lord,
What is it we must do?
Is it, then, all untrue?"
Arthur H. Clough.

"I CANNOT bear it—I cannot bear it," cried Marjory, throwing herself upon her bed.

"I cannot bear it," she repeated aloud—that vain cry so often uttered by young hearts. It went out disregarded into the summer air; and found nothing to soothe or stay it. As Gerald said, she must accept the fact. The fact that her hope had failed. That her prayer had been refused. That she could not help him. That he must continue plodding here, that gifted spirit fettered, — for how long? who could tell. It would have been better, she thought now, that Mr. Harding's offer had not come. It had but served to brighten a mirage which had seemed

reality. Now that the mirage had faded, what was the world to her?

What was the world? Had she ever truly known it? or had she seen it, all her life, through her own colouring? She had known trials before—outward trials; poverty, and privation. But these things had not disturbed her confidence that the universe was ruled by love. Now an avalanche had overwhelmed all to which she had clung. She knew no longer what to believe; or where to turn.

Hugh Vivian had smiled at her credulity in building literal hopes upon prayer; and she had prayed the more, that thus his error might be proved to him. But now—had he been right? What did those words of promise mean? They must mean something, if worthy of credence at all; something definite, dependable. If, as some said, they could be explained away into some misty emptiness of metaphor, where was their use? If they were not to be relied upon in the practical life of this world, the daily life where help and guidance are so sorely needed, why were they spoken? Could a Saviour delude us so? Or were they a cruel fable, of human invention? was the Bible a merely human

composition, a tissue of lying philosophies? Marjory's whole soul cried out against the possibility; and yet—where was God—the God in whom she had trusted? It was as though God did not care; as if He had left them to themselves:—Gerald's whole life—her anxious toil—Hugh Vivian, and all he had valued. As she lay in tearless anguish, looking mechanically towards the sky, she realized suddenly, with awful force, as a fact, all the sorrow, pain, care, sin, of this mysterious world. And God could help it all, if so He willed! for He is omnipotent. As this thought pierced her mind, she almost wondered that some voice from the world of spirits did not answer it. She raised her head; but all was silence in those far blue heights. Hearts break, reasons give way, souls go on to destruction: and still silence! A kind of terror came over Marjory: terror of life, of fate.

She remembered all that she had learned, of "all for the best," and so forth. But this trouble seemed all for the worst. The whole purpose of Gerald's existence seemed to be thwarted; his powers wasted, his work shut up out of his reach. All his life he had been disappointed. He had not rebelled; he had

nerved himself, shouldered his burden, and struggled on: and yet all things were against him.

And how could Hugh Vivian's sorrows be for the best? His whole nature had suffered; he had lost hope, faith, love; and none interfered. And herself—was it for the best that her acceptance of Christ's words should end in doubt and fear? Was she in a better or a worse frame of mind now, than this time last year, when she had cheered Gerald, and encouraged him to trust in God?

No—she could not understand; she could not see. She was alone in thick darkness. Now she understood, as never before, Hugh Vivian's experiences. It had been easy enough, he told her, to preach and theorize. Now her turn had come. God had not helped him, he said: God was not helping her.

Then followed wild rebellion. Why was the world thus? If Gerald had not been within hearing, she would have wailed and moaned aloud. It was hard, it was terrible. She tried to pray; but no comfort came. She did not know how to pray to this inflexible God! He could not really love the world, she thought: or how could he leave it so?

Until now, she had had no notion of the depths of her own nature. She found in herself capacities of hell, of which she had never dreamed. After all, she thought, the happiest way might be to let everything go; to believe in nothing, hope nothing, fear nothing, and do the best one can for oneself. Presently she rose and went back to the sitting-room, and rang for tea, as though nothing had happened; but all the while her warm life and hope and faith seemed to have turned into a cold and heavy stone, dragging down her heart.

Gerald, meanwhile, was very silent, still with that strange, fixed look. Later, when all was quiet, Marjory perceived that he had fallen asleep. Seen in repose, his face seemed very wan and thin; his stern command of it relaxed; that stone within her grew colder, as she marked the careworn lines of his mouth. Presently his countenance brightened; he was evidently dreaming. He smiled, and murmured some word which sounded like "Wonderful!" Awakened by his own voice, his eyes opened, full of a blessed peace; he looked dreamily round; then the peace faded, as a glow fades on a landscape, and the resolute fixedness returned.

"Gerald! what were you dreaming?"

"I thought I was at Venice. A passage which I read once, and have never forgotten, shaped itself into a vision. This passage said that 'an all-pervading presence of light,' and 'a suffusion of rich colour glowing through the deepest shadows,' were 'the very life and soul of Venice.' I saw the light, and I saw the colour—a sunset glowing on the water, gondolas floating slowly, a vine-tree climbing round an ancient archway, a great hall, golden in the evening rays, hung with Titian's pictures. Our disappointment seemed like a dream; all my hard work was over: I stood in the hall with Mr. Harding, and he said—'Here we will learn the secrets of the great master!'"

"It is a great mystery, Gerald."

"What?"

"That life is so against you: I mean, not looking at second causes, but at Providence. Why is it?—why?"

"We may say 'Why,' for ever. These things are beyond us. It is waste of time and energy to dwell upon them."

"But suppose one cannot help it?"

"You don't know what you can do till you try, Marjory," said Gerald, with rather a wintry smile; "I advise you to strive your

utmost to make up your mind to the inevitable."

"But how?"

"To begin, don't waste your strength in railing at it. Complaints can do no good. And don't invent bright visions, and mistake them for truth."

"Have I done that?"

"I fear so; and I blame myself for encouraging you in it. I should have remembered that long ago I had resolved to give up castles in the air:—years and years ago, when I left school."

"When first you were sent to the bank?"

"Yes, I fought out the battle, and thought I had conquered; but the same delusions crop up again in different forms. I shall be more on the watch for them now. At that time I spent one whole day alone in the woods, and faced my future; and I determined—once and for ever, as I fancied—to take life as it came, whether it came as I would have it, or no."

"You might determine; but people cannot crush out their individuality in that way."

"No, but they can keep it under. They can submit. Looking at life as a whole, one can't help seeing that there are bright lots

and dark lots. It seems appointed that certain people should never succeed. Till I talked to you last year at Rockswold, I felt convinced that I was one of those."

He did not speak despairingly, or with self-pity; there was nothing unmanly or mawkish in look or tone. On the contrary, he had never, to Marjory's eye, seemed more manly, more courageous.

"But what a paralyzing creed!" she cried.

"Not at all. It has never paralyzed me. I have never been any less determined to do my best, so far as Fortune would let me. But I believe that the truest wisdom lies in calm acceptance of one's fate—not turning away and repining, like a spoilt child, but facing it like a man."

"But you would escape such a fate if you could?"

"If I could!" repeated Gerald, a little impatiently. A momentary fire flashed in his gray eye, but it was as speedily quenched.—"I cannot: and that is enough. It is those 'ifs' that make it so unbearable. I have returned to my old conviction, that life is not to be a success for me. If I should find the contrary, I shall be too glad to own the mistake! But I have made up my mind to

the worst again; and I have done with dreams."

His tone was cold; but a slight, a very slight, quiver of his lip did not escape Marjory. She felt that she could not rest without knowing more.

"Gerald," she said, timidly, "Don't answer if you would rather not: but I should like to know—Will this have any effect on your engagement?"

He was silent for a minute, shading his face with his hand.

"I am not sure," he said at last: "That must depend on circumstances. It may be —I can't count upon it—but it may be, that I shall find other means, more certain, of getting sooner free from the debt. Perhaps your friend Vivian might find me a little work in the way of illustrating books or magazines."

"I am sure he will, if he can. Only he is going away."

"Yes, but if he could get me a start, that might open the way for more. And I might hit upon one or two other ways of turning an honest penny in my evenings. Altogether, I don't despair of shortening my payments by a couple of years."

"Well," said Marjory; for he had paused suddenly.

"Well! if Mr. Harding should not have forgotten me by then, I might yet win some sort of footing. I could never be a great artist, without travel or cultivation; but I might make enough to keep the pot boiling, as they say."

"And the point is, whether you and Lina think all this sufficient certainty to wait for?"

He paused again.

"The point is,"—he returned, his tone very low and firm—"whether she loves me enough to make it worth her waiting."

Marjory knew not how to answer. She had never felt more strongly that Gerald's ideal was scarcely less of a dream, than the success of her own story had been. He waited for a reply; but, when none came; —"I shall find out some day," he said, in the same low tone: "Don't mention this any more, Marjory. I shall find out."

CHAPTER II.

"If e'er, when faith had fall'n asleep,
I heard a voice, 'Believe no more;'
And heard an ever-breaking shore
That tumbled in the godless deep;

"A warmth within the breast would melt
The freezing reason's colder part,
And, like a man in wrath, the heart
Stood up, and answered, 'I have felt.'"

Tennyson.

"So long as thou doest well unto thyself, men shall speak well of thee." Marjory's hopefulness had inspired even Lina with corresponding expectation. But now, when informed of the failure, she expressed no surprise, rather censuring the presumption of building hopes upon so insecure a basis.

"Your usual way, you know, dear Marjory! jumping at conclusions. You would be less disappointed, had you remembered that possibilities are not certainties."

"But, Lina, you yourself encouraged me! and I thought the more of that, because you are really qualified to judge."

"Well, there was certainly promise in your story; but so, I dare say, there may be in many other writings whose authors come to nothing. Just think of the competition in the literary world! And competition proves one's level."

Marjory felt too utterly cast down to reply. She bore in silence the half-contemptuous verdict.

Was Lina disappointed likewise? Marjory could not tell; she doubted whether Gerald could tell, either. He made no further confidences; and, only when all was settled, did she discover that he had written to Hugh Vivian, receiving first a kind answer, and shortly afterwards an order for illustrations. The sum offered appeared to Marjory poor payment for so much labour; but Gerald made no objection.

"Every little helps," he said: "I must creep before I can fly."

His visible feeling, that he had now no resource beyond his own unaided exertions, vexed her to the heart. But this also she bore in silence.

It was the harder to bear, since exertion was evidently an effort to him. He never complained; and to guess how much he suffered

was not easy; but that he did suffer continually, Marjory felt certain. Now and then, as day followed day, and yet there was no relief, he would express a languid doubt as to whether Mr. Robinson understood his case: but he said nothing further. Only he obeyed every direction with a care in itself significant, consenting without remonstrance to sit hour after hour, his knee supported on the sofa; an involuntary contraction of his brow showed movement to be painful.

One evening the bank manager called upon him; and, from their conversation, Marjory learned that he had written to request employment at home. For the present the request was granted; and thenceforth he was laboriously occupied during the greater part of the day. How long such an arrangement could continue, Marjory dared not question. Surely, surely, it would not be long needful!

Meanwhile Mr. Robinson did not commit himself to any positive verdict. He paid frequent visits, short and cheerful, leaving a cheerful impression: but when this had faded nothing solid remained. To Marjory's questions he always replied: "We must have patience;" "These cases cannot be

hurried;" or, "Keep up his strength, if you please." She had as yet no definite understanding of the ailment—beyond the fact, reiterated by Mr. Robinson, that there was "some slight injury to the joint."

In these days Gerald saw but little of Lina. He could no longer in the evenings, after hurrying through his tea, stride away to Albion Square; and perhaps it was more seemly that Lina should not too often visit him. This, however, was not her excuse to Marjory—or to Gerald himself. To them she pleaded her avocations at St. Philip's; the daily services, with additional ones on Wednesday and Friday,—the orphanage, the day and night schools, the decorations and altar-vases,—besides church needlework, cassocks to be made or mended, altar-linen, and the like. Undoubtedly she had abundance of such work on her hands; the question was, whether a part of it could not be equally well done by some one else. Lina herself thought not.

She had besides to superintend Mrs. Peele, and the household generally, to attend Philharmonic practices, to pay calls, and accept invitations—conferring thereby honour and benefit of which she would have been sorry

to deprive her acquaintance! Altogether but little space in her life was left for her betrothed husband, now that he could no longer make it for himself. She had no time to cheer his imprisonment, or to dispel his dreary thoughts—drearier from loneliness and weakness. Gerald would not for the world have hindered her in any duty; it was not at first that he questioned how much of her routine came from duty, how much from something else. Only every day and every night he felt it less bearable to lie craving for her, dreaming of her, tormented by doubts concerning her and their prospects.

Meanwhile the glorious summer had expanded into fulness of beauty. Again, as last year, in the long evenings, Heathcroft was thronged; boats full of youths and maidens sped up and down the river; the toilers of the great city found sweet refreshment, after the heat of the day, upon its banks. Marjory was to have spent her summer holiday at Rockswold; but when the time arrived Gerald was still confined to the sofa; Mr. Robinson was still repeating that these cases required patience. She could not leave him: and would not if she could.

As at Christmas, Mrs. Myers and Miss

Pilkington departed with their pupils; and the two houses were once more very quiet. The good ladies left Marjory *carte-blanche* to read their books, gather their roses, and make free use in every way of their possessions. Others were also kind, sending fruit and similar delicacies; and carriages were offered for Gerald. He did drive out once; but with such increase of pain, that the experiment was not again attempted. Gradually, the utmost that he could do was to get out into the strip of walled garden behind the house; but the exertion of dragging himself up and down stairs seemed to counteract the benefit of the air. One evening the pain which followed was so violent, that he would not risk its repetition. After this Marjory went out, in the garden, as beyond it, alone.

Yet he would not hear himself called ill. The "strain" was exceptionally troublesome; but it was only, he said, the confinement and the lack of fresh air which made him weak and out of sorts. Lina appeared to be of the same opinion; at all events, she was not anxious, or fretted in any way by his condition. In her occasional visits, she seemed no less immovable than ever. "How are you to-day, Gerald?" she would say with her

usual serenity; and sit composedly down to chat like any ordinary acquaintance.

And meanwhile, Gerald's gray eyes would be fixed on her with a gaze which had in it a whole world beyond her powers. After she was gone, he would seem still to see her, looking silently towards the window, as if she had flown from the chair vacant by his sofa, to the cathedral roof. When she was long absent, he would write to her. Marjory would have given a great deal to read those letters; they would have told her infinitely more than they told Lina.

So the summer days went on. In the evenings, while Gerald worked at his illustrations, Marjory sang and played. All her heart found vent in that music; she was not of his silent nature,—a vent of some kind she must have. Those songs were voices crying in vague language; some were French voices, Italian voices, German voices,—the deepest these last. How wonderful that they spoke for Marjory, that they uttered her soul! she would sing on, forgetting where she was, almost what she was; and Gerald would not notice how time was going. Only at last the twilight would grow dimmer; and a star would twinkle out above the cathedral

tower. And then she would stop, with a craving, not all painful, in her heart.

The beauty of a summer's evening has in it something mysterious, suggesting infinite possibilities. We reach vaguely towards them, but they cannot be grasped—or even comprehended: yet, as we turn away, the work-a-day world seems cold. Often, on these special evenings, Marjory's young heart felt like a bird imprisoned within her. At last, on one of them, when Lina was with Gerald, she took some paper, and began to write once more: hardly, at first, knowing what she wrote. But by degrees it shaped itself; and thenceforth, frequently, she sought the same relief. Soon a new story grew beneath her hand, reflecting her own experiences. All those terrible doubts and fears flowed out in it. This time she did not dream of publication or success: she wrote because her heart was full.

One morning, Gerald had retired to his own room to avoid the sun which, before mid-day, shone too powerfully upon his sofa; and she, in her turn alone, was sewing at a set of new shirts for him, when Priscilla announced "Mr. Vivian."

Marjory's first glimpse of him revealed a

deepening of the old bitterness. He looked careworn, thin, and sick of all things: far more so, than when she had seen him last. But his brown face flushed a little, his eyes flashed with sudden brightening, as they met hers.

"I did not expect to see you at this time!"

"You forget that these are my holidays. Do you want Gerald?"

"I have some instructions for his pictures," replied Hugh, drawing a note from his waistcoat-pocket: "I hope he is better, as I don't find him here?"

Marjory shook her head.

"He is working in his own room. I'll tell him."

She returned almost instantly, saying that Gerald would be thankful if Mr. Vivian could wait a little while. Then she took up her shirt again, and hemmed busily.

"He has some pressing work this morning," she said, to break the silence, while Hugh Vivian sat watching, as in a dream.

"I think his pluck is wonderful. I suppose he is patient by nature?"

"I don't know. That hardly describes him. I think it is more that, for so many years, he has forced himself to be patient."

"And now he finds it easy?"

"I don't know," repeated Marjory: "He is very silent. He has had trouble and disappointment all his life." She bit her lip to check the rising tears.

"Have your prayers been heard yet?" said Hugh suddenly.

Was it he, the Mr. Hugh of old, or a scoffing demon, who spoke? The very tone seemed in itself to say: "Where is now thy God?" Yet something in Marjory's own heart echoed it. She could not look up and answer him, as she had done before. This was the time of which he had spoken, some months ago—a time when all foundations seemed to be overturned. She did not look at him directly; she turned towards the window. There was the silent sky,—so blue and hard.

"Ah, your turn has come now!" said Hugh.

Then she did look. His eyes were reckless, mocking.

"Are you yourself?" said Marjory, involuntarily: "I can hardly believe it."

"What self do you mean? The self of that old dream at Thorne?—or the one you have known lately? They are two."

"I could almost think so, now," said Marjory. "But I will not. The old self—that kind, happy, pleasant nature—you try your best to kill it; but it is not dead."

"Yes, it is," he said, almost rudely: "I am altogether another man from the fool you knew. I have learned wisdom—in a hard enough school."

"Is despair wisdom?" said Marjory.

He went on as if he had not heard.

"One wouldn't wonder so much, perhaps, at a selfish young dog, such as I was, having to suffer. But a fellow like your brother—whose life has been perfect! And you!" he added, with a sudden change of tone—"You!"

He rose, and walked to the window.

"Yes, if prayer had any reality, yours must have been heard," he said moodily.

A battle was fighting itself out in Marjory's heart. She was thinking of the triumph, the blessing to him, which she had anticipated, when she should tell him, that she, so young and crude, had succeeded—of this, and of her prayer for him, of so many years. Blackness of darkness seemed around her. But her glance fell upon that bitter and hopeless face. She had wished to raise him,—and should

she sink him instead? For his sake she would gather courage.

"Mr. Hugh!"

He smiled faintly.

"That old name!" he said: "I had half forgotten it."

"I forgot, too—Mr. Vivian, I meant.—Will you listen for one moment?"

"For any number of moments."

"It is quite true that my prayers seem not to have been heard. I—I had better confess it: my plan has failed."

"Yes!" said he, gently, too delicate to question, but comprehending at once, as she saw.

"I have disappointed Gerald, as well as myself. It is very painful."

She paused, to choke down a sob.

"And you had entire faith," he said. "You took those promises literally—that according to your faith so it should be: and found them a mockery."

"I cannot understand it," said Marjory; "But it is mystery, not mockery. I cannot understand. *But I will go on trying to believe.*"

This was all she could truthfully say; and hitherto she had not been able even

to say this. It was the fear of adding to his despair that strengthened her.

Yes—for his sake, she would go on trying to believe.

CHAPTER III.

"Oh for a draught of vintage, that hath been
Cool'd a long age in the deep-delved earth,
Tasting of Flora and the country-green,
Dance, and Provençal song, and sunburnt mirth!
* * * *
That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,
And with thee fade away into the forest dim:

"Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget
What thou among the leaves hast never known."
Keats.

"If I had you out at Thorne, sir, begging your pardon, I think I could do you more good than doctors. Miss Stanhope here will remember how clever her ladyship was, in herbs and them. 'Tis wonderful what healing the Almighty has put in the fields and lanes about our feet, if we will just take pains to seek it!"

Thus Bellhouse: who had called to see Marjory, after a morning's shopping in the town.

"And the old place, ma'am, is looking

lovely. There's nothing like the country, sir! and upon times I think there's no country like the country about Thorne. Her ladyship's garden—it is a picture; all the roses out! I don't know when her Gloire de Dijon in especial—you've not forgot it, Miss Stanhope, my dear?—has come to such splendour. And the birds do sing beautiful of evenings, in the grove. You'll remember the thrushes, ma'am, and the wood-pigeons, no doubt."

"Don't talk of it any more, Mrs. Bellhouse," said Gerald, "or you will start me off forthwith; and the walk would hardly improve my strain."

"No, sir—and I'm hindering your writings, too. But if you should find yourself a little weakly, when you get about again, and feel a fancy for country air, I know of a good lodging in Thorne village; and not out of the way expensive, neither."

"I'm afraid it is more than a strain, Bellhouse," said Marjory, when she had taken her old friend away for a quiet talk.

"You're not anxious about him, ma'am, I hope?"

"Yes, I am; very anxious. I may tell you; I have had no one to tell anything of,

lately. It is six weeks since his knee was hurt; and he is worse, not better. I know he is worse, though he tries to hide it. Bellhouse, isn't there some dangerous complaint which comes in the knee?"

"You're not fretting yourself, thinking of that, Miss Stanhope, my dear?" said the old servant, tenderly. Her motherly heart yearned over the girl, in whose face she had quickly read the signs of trouble.

"But isn't there? I would rather know. I have not dared to ask any one, before."

"I knew a young boy, many years ago, who had a white swelling, my dear. But he was weakly from birth; and it was a mercy, every one said, when the Almighty took him. Your brother's not like him, Miss Stanhope, my dear."

"We won't talk of this any more," cried Marjory.

She left the subject, resolutely.

"And everything is going on well at Thorne?"

"Yes, ma'am. It's very quiet,—but all as natural as ever; and often of an afternoon, when I am sewing, it seems as if they was only gone out, and I should hear their voices

presently in the passage. I sit in that old room you remember, ma'am, and live things over again, like reading an old story. And many lessons I learn so, which I missed at the time. Yes—it will be a sore trial to leave the old place; but I must make up my mind to it."

"Why? What has happened?"

"Mr. Crawford wrote word, ma'am, a week ago, that the estate was put up for sale, and I must hold myself in readiness to show the house, at any time required. When I remember Copelands, Miss Stanhope, my dear, my heart sinks within me. To be sure, Mr. Crawford did say, when he was over, that he would never sell the place but to those who would know how to value it; but no one can say how money might tempt him! It's a pity but he could be content to live there, himself. Her ladyship is sorely missed in the village; a squire's family would be welcomed by one and all."

"To think of Thorne for sale!" said Marjory, musingly. It seemed another mark of the dreariness of the world.

"Does Mr. Vivian know?"

"Yes, he knows—poor young gentleman! He was over the other day, and he said he

supposed he must find some other place for his pictures—those her ladyship left to him, ma'am. I thought he seemed thin and worn; my heart grieved for him, when I remembered the petted boy he used to be. Why, Miss Stanhope, my dear, if he but scratched his finger, Mrs. Vivian was all anxiety! and every wish he had, be it costly or cheap, it must be satisfied to the minute. I fear he don't look to the Almighty as he might; and he has no one else, now, to care for him. He didn't say much about Thorne; but I saw him leaning on the terrace wall, watching the house, and thinking, ever such a time!"

"You know that he is going away himself?"

"Yes, ma'am. I asked him if it was true, and he said he was bound to go,—that he hated it, but couldn't help himself. It struck me, Miss Stanhope, my dear, to wonder if there was a lady in the case? I hope you won't think me very bold for such fancies; the thought flashed into my mind, of a sudden."

"How hot it is!" said Marjory, bending from the window.

"Yes, ma'am, a very sultry day—and,

begging your pardon, you're heating yourself the more by leaning out in the sun. I wish I could get you to Thorne,—you and your brother. But, as I was saying—poor Mr. Hugh, he has looked that wretched of late, and reckless with it, as if he tried not to care, and yet his heart was half broken! He always was a boy to crave after anything he set his mind on. Whether it was a dog, or a pony, or what not, he'd think of it night and day. Partly his parents spoiled him so, no doubt, because he couldn't brood denial; and partly, too, if I don't mistake, that's why the Almighty has seen fit to try him. But I should be glad if he might be spared any more. No one can tell what that proud and masterful young spirit of his, Miss Stanhope, has suffered!"

"No," said Marjory.

"And it seemed to me, the other evening, I saw a look on his face, uncommon like what I remember long ago, when he was set on anything, and—seldom enough—by some mischance, couldn't have it. A deal more hopeless than the old look, but yet the same in kind; and that, and the way he spoke, set me wondering."

"Does he often go over to Thorne?"

"I've often heard of his being about the park, and places, when I've not seen him myself; and upon times he comes to the house. Maybe he's fretting to think that he will soon be no less of a stranger at Thorne than at Copelands. It will be a sore trial to him, if Thorne is sold: he has known every inch of the ground from his babyhood. I remember, ma'am, as if it was yesterday," said the old servant, rambling from one topic to another, "when Mr. Hugh was born: and the grand doings over at Copelands. It was shortly after I married, when I was living in Thorne village. Yes—that little house where Bellhouse and me lived so happy, and where my Jessie was born,—that is gone like the rest—pulled down these three years. Else I should have been very well content, if I was turned out, to go back there."

> "All is vanish'd now, and fled—
> Some are married—some are dead!"

The plaintive little song resounded in Marjory's mind. Bellhouse was wiping away a few patient tears; when they were gone, she looked out quietly, with her usual calm gravity, over the river.

"Perhaps Thorne may be bought by some

nice family who will be only too glad to keep you."

"I don't know, my dear; some has a great objection to old servants situated like me—and I won't deny but with reason,—as I myself have seen in former days, when young brides have first come home, and such like. Airs have been shown, and liberties took, that I have been grieved to see, ma'am, particular in respectable servants: but I hope the Almighty's grace would keep me back from that. Still, the family mightn't know but I should be so: or they themselves mightn't be such as I could bear to see in my lady's old rooms, using her furniture and picking her flowers. Oh, that would be a bitter pill to me, Miss Stanhope, my dear! Strangers couldn't be expected to reverence her; but I doubt I should be best away."

"I wish I could save you this fresh trouble, Bellhouse," said Marjory earnestly.

"Thank you, my dear: You were always pitiful, from a child. But I leave it with the Almighty."

That strong and simple confidence in "The Almighty!" no canting form of speech, but a living truth. Somehow, when Bellhouse was gone, Marjory no longer felt that doubt, to

her so terrible, of the very existence of the God to whom she had prayed. To "walk in darkness, and have no light;" and yet to believe:—some such possibility dawned on her.

In the evening, her thoughts found their usual vent: she sat in her window, and wrote. All the town was out of doors, after the long day's heat; voices and footsteps, and the splash of oars, came up from below. Marjory longed to be walking with Gerald, as in the happy evenings of last summer. As she watched the river in the crimson light, she thought of Paradise, and "the river of God," and wished that all were over, and they safe there. When would they walk again on earth together—she and the brother whom she loved?

Bellhouse's suggestion of a visit to Thorne had taken a strange hold of Gerald's fancy. By degrees it gathered all the strength of a sick man's feverish craving. But, when Marjory spoke of possibilities, he said he had already been so troublesome to the bank, that he felt it out of the question to ask for a holiday, before his time. If he lost his situation, what would become of him and—— He stopped short, with a heavy sigh: most painful to Marjory.

A season of dry and sultry weather had set in, like the Branksome summer, years ago. All who were able went off to the sea or other seasonable resorts; those too busy or too poor to leave the town, panted and endured. The streets seemed baked to scorching; every one longed for the evenings, when at least the sun went down: but earth and air were often so thoroughly heated, that even these were oppressive. To look at the river was to desire to plunge into its dark depths; and Marjory thought with envy of Kingsley's "Water Babies." Below her windows, however, it had become shallow, and was less refreshing than elsewhere; and boats ran aground, and boys waded from shore to shore.

But this limited tract was all that Gerald could see of it, or feel of the cool air from its waters. For him there was no escape from the imprisoning house. He bore it very patiently, until the Peeles departed to Aberystwith. Lina said that she was too busy to remain from home beyond a fortnight; but that fortnight seemed in anticipation an eternity to Gerald!

"I suppose I shall get through it somehow," he said drearily, as she sat, on the last evening, beside his sofa.

"Oh, yes; it will pass in due time. You used not to be so impatient!"

"I don't know. Perhaps I was much the same: only I could keep it under. I suppose this long confinement tries my nerves; and you are my one gleam of brightness."

Marjory, at the other end of the room, looked at him, and then at Lina, with swelling breast. If she had been Lina, could she have borne to leave him, to add to his trial? He looked very thin to-night, with a brightness in his eye, a fever on his cheek, which troubled Marjory. The physical pain alone, which her watchfulness knew to be incessant,—how would his constitution bear it, if it went on?

"Well, I shall hope to find you better when I return," said Lina; "perhaps you will be at the station to meet us."

"I don't know; a month ago, I should have said, Of course: but nothing moves this aching. What a log I am! To think I can't see you off to-morrow!—You're not going?"

"I have to look in at the orphanage," said Lina, drawing on her gloves imperturbably, with a sweet smile.

"I wish I were an orphan—in the

hospital! Do stay just ten minutes—only ten minutes! I'll look at my watch."

Marjory was discreetly leaving the room, and heard no more; but it could not have been two minutes later, when the door again opened and closed, and she heard Lina's step on the stairs.

"Oh, Lina! You are really going so soon?"

"My dear Marjory, it would be foolish to encourage Gerald in the habit of such constant intercourse. It cannot go on through all our long engagement; and it is false kindness. My duties must not depend on impulse: I should soon lose all method."

"You don't realize what it is to him to lie there all day; and he listens so for your step!"

"Every one is ill sometimes, dear; and Gerald is not a child. I shall be late, as it is, at the orphanage. Good-bye."

She kissed Marjory, smiled another sweet smile, and went gracefully away. Gerald, painful though movement was to him, had dragged himself to the window."

"Let's see,—what did old John of Gaunt grant to Sir Roger Burgoyne?"—he said, with a strange smile, when the vision was gone by:

'All Sutton and Potton,
Until the world's rotten.'

The world's rotten already, I think."

"I hope not!" cried Marjory.

"Perhaps only my corner of it," said Gerald.

The next morning she found him, with Bradshaw's map spread open, studying the route to Aberystwith.

"What a log I am!" he repeated, as Marjory poured out his tea; "or, rather, I'm shut up in one. My mind is all alive, and craving to be out and away: and my body is a log."

"You will forget all this, when you are better."

"When!" re-echoed Gerald.

He was very silent during breakfast; but afterwards he plodded as usual through his day's work. In the evening, when work was over, he leaned wearily back against the sofa cushions. Upon his face was written heartache, and anxious thought.

"You are tired, Gerald," said Marjory, gently smoothing the fair hair from the care-worn young brow. He turned his head restlessly away.

"Tired! Yes—tired and sick, of the

world and everything in it. Things were bad enough before, Marjory; but at any rate I wasn't a log."

"How that horrible word haunts you!"

"I have horrible dreams, sometimes. I dreamed last night that I was a cripple for life."

"Oh, Gerald!—it was nothing but a dream."

"I hope so. After all, Flaxman—— But no, that's a delusion. What time is it, Marjory?"

The cathedral clock was striking.

"Only eight! How this day has dragged! Fourteen more,—to say nothing of the nights."

"Good times, and bad times, and all times pass over," quoted Marjory, as cheerily as she was able.

"All times," repeated Gerald, with another strange smile: "Lifetimes amongst the rest. But, if a fortnight seem so unendurable, what of a life?"

"Why will you worry yourself with fancies?"

"I am a coward," he said suddenly: "Marjory, are you going to play? Just hand me that book at your elbow." And while

she strove by her music to charm him back to peace, he read steadily, as since morning he had worked steadily. The habit, strengthened by necessity, of self-command, had imparted to him, throughout the past weeks, a fortitude which filled her with wonder. But now, from day to day, during Lina's absence, she saw that he was failing. Whether the excitement of those visits—few and short though they were—and their anticipation, had helped to sustain him; or whether he were harassed by thoughts in connection with her, Marjory could not tell; but a constant fever, physical and mental, consumed him. The hot weather seemed intolerable to him; his work was performed amid painful pauses for rest, which yet was not rest.

Lower and lower into the depths, Marjory felt herself sinking. She was alone; Gerald's silence was one of her trials; if only he would tell her of his mind, she thought, she could bear all things better. Or if she could talk to him! He had always been kind, sympathising as any woman, in all that troubled her; but she would not add to his present misery by speaking of her own share. Neither would she write gloomily to Rockswold. Her uncle was fully occupied by

parish cares, and her aunt was always delicate. She was alone: she must bear on alone, as best she could.

She too, in this scorching weather, pined for the country. If not sick in body like Gerald, she was sick at heart; and in the country, as she was well aware, was healing. The breeze gently stirring in shady heights; the singing of brooks—such as the brook at Thorne; bees with their soothing hum; the meadows rising and falling in daisied knolls; the fertile hedgerows; the creatures in field and wood: she thought of all with longing which none can feel, who do not know and love them.

There was a song which she often sang on these close evenings: the same which had been sung by Lina, a year before, at Mrs. Carberry's party, and to which she had seen Hugh Vivian listen with that intensity of remembrance. And Gerald in his turn would listen, half closing his book, and looking away, as if he saw the place; and then he would beg for it again,—Marjory cared not how often.

"O forest green and fair!
O pine-trees waving high!

"Marjory, would you get me my sketching-block?

> 'Lulled by many a murmuring stream,
> Through the long bright hours to dream—

Oh, if we could be there, at this moment, on that 'bank of moss!' Fancy the forest darkening all around, and the pine-trees above: care would seem light—one would come back able to bear it. Never mind!—drawing it is next best. Go on, Marjory."

And for a while he was happy, listening, and embodying that to which he listened, until it seemed to him that he was almost there. But, afterwards, the small sitting-room, pent about by houses, seemed the closer.

One evening, when he had extra work, and wished to be quiet, Marjory strolled out into the fields. She did not fancy the Heathcroft throngs, and turned in the opposite direction—into those meadows where, on New Year's Eve, she had encountered Mr. Vivian. The scene so recalled their conversation, that it seemed only natural when once again she found him at her side.

"You don't generally walk so slowly," he said; "I calculated that I should overtake you about the end of that next field. This

is the third evening I have been watching about for you; I am glad I have succeeded at last."

"Why did you not come to the house? I am in most of the day."

"Yes, but I wanted to see you alone. I have a great favour to ask of you."

"You raise my curiosity," said Marjory.

"Well, then,—I have been thinking of what you told me a week or two ago; and I want to know if you will let me help you."

"In what way?"

"In the plan you hoped to carry out, which you said had failed. I use ambiguous language, for fear of offence; but you know that I know that you know that I know what you meant."

"Mr. Vivian, how absurd you are!" said Marjory, smiling in spite of herself.

"You see we are old friends: nine years ago, I am sure you would not have minded coming to me if I could help you through any scrape. Now this is not a scrape, only a difficulty; and you ought not to give way to such pride."

"You must speak more plainly," said Marjory.

"You give me leave? Then, to put it

as plainly as possible, you cannot publish your book. Well, you fought shy of me before; but I've had a good bit of experience in these ways, and I believe I could give you a hint. Only, to make this possible, you must show me the story."

Marjory's colour came and went like a flickering flame; she had all the first shyness of a young author; but she thought of Gerald—remembered the critic's power—and hesitated.

"How could that hurt you in any way?" he went on. "I will breathe no word of it to any one. Do believe me. I have no object but to help you."

"What would you do when you had read it?"

"I should see at a glance, without reading every part of it, whether it could be made marketable, and how; and afterwards, if you would let me, I would find a publisher."

"I cannot afford to throw away such help," said Marjory, after a pause. "There is another story, much shorter than the first, which I have been writing lately. It is not finished, but it will do for a specimen; and I think it is the better of the two. If you see either, it ought to be the best: such a critic as you!" she added with some malice.

You will never forgive me for being a critic! Well, it is settled, then? I will call at your door to-morrow, or perhaps to-night, for the manuscript."

"You are very kind," said Marjory.

"Kind, am I?—No! the kindness is on your side."

She blushed hotly; and, to change the subject, proceeded, after a somewhat awkward pause, to talk of Thorne.

"I should think that fellow Crawford must be mad," said Hugh; "But to him, I suppose, it is only a dull old piece of rustication."

"To me it has seemed a Paradise on earth!"

"And it might seem something not far from that, if I had it now, to me. I did not feel this always, though," he said, musingly; "You know the old song?

'When all the world is young, lad—
And all the trees are green—
And every goose a swan, lad,
And every lass a queen—
Then hey for boot and horse, lad,
And round the world away!
Young blood must have its course, lad,
And every dog his day."

That was just like me in those days when you saw me at Thorne."

"Do you know I have often thought of you when I sang it?" said Marjory. As she spoke, she had a vision of the gay young soldier, riding so carelessly on his beautiful chestnut, down the shady lane. And Jessie! she, too, was in that vision.

"Every goose a swan, lad—And every lass a queen!" he repeated. Could he be thinking of Jessie? "Yes, that was the way with me, then. I should have thought it hard lines indeed to be confined to Thorne, or to Copelands either! How strangely times bring one down!"

In the same dreamy manner he went on with the other verse:—

"When all the world is old, lad—
And all the trees are brown—
And all the sport is stale, lad—
And all the wheels run down:
Creep home and take thy place there,
The maimed and halt among—
God grant you find one face there
You loved when all was young!"

As he said the last words, he glanced at Marjory.

"It would be difficult to find any face so

unchanged as yours," he said, as if half unconsciously; "But the home is gone."

"You may have one again, some day," said Marjory, with a passionate longing to comfort him.

"It will have to drop from the skies, then! I can make enough for what are called the necessaries of life—life in lodgings; and that is about all. If I set to work at once to save and screw, it might just keep me from the parish in my old age."

"Mr. Vivian!"

"I mean it literally. Then this criticism, which makes me such a bugbear! if I were one of the regular clique, I might get a good bit out of that. But then I can only do that sort of thing by fits and starts. I can't depend on myself enough to make a paying trade of it."

"I think it is wonderful that you made anything of it, considering——"

"Considering my empty-headedness in years past, you mean? Yes, it is true that I was terribly idle. I was never made to work; and I learned nothing that could be of use afterwards. I should think there was never a more helpless young fellow than I, when I was first thrown loose on the world, with my mother to support."

"I know very well how you must have felt," said Marjory; "I myself——"

"Yes?" said Hugh, attentively.

"It seems selfish to trouble you in this way with my own affairs. I was only going to say that I know what it is to be anxious. I am often anxious now about Gerald's bank-work. The present arrangement cannot last; and yet he will not be able to go back."

"You fear that he will have to give up his situation?"

"I do fear it—at least, for a time."

Hugh meditated.

"It will be only a small amount of help," he said; "but still some. If this should happen, and he should care for a little law copying, I could put him in the way of it. Perhaps he'll let me know."

"You are too kind," Marjory exclaimed: "We ought not to accept so much from you."

"There comes in your pride!" said Hugh, smiling; "Not the dirty pride of scorning the work—but another quite as real. It is simply that I know a good fellow here, a solicitor, who has not enough work for two clerks, and yet more than his one clerk can manage. He would be glad to hear of a clear

hand like your brother's; and he is too much of a gentleman to publish it among the Alton gossips."

"Though, as to that, I don't think we should care," said Marjory; "Gerald and I have long numbered ourselves among the working-classes. I wish I could get him into these fields," she added, somewhat irrelevantly.

"He feels the heat very much?"

"That and the pain are wearing him out. Sometimes our little room seems to me like a prison, Mr. Vivian. It is far worse to see another suffer, without power to help, than to suffer oneself! I long to get him away, and give him all he craves for, and yet I cannot."

"It is strange—I have noticed that you seem to be now almost exactly circumstanced as I was at this very time, or a little later, seven years ago."

"Seven years! were you at Bullingham?"

"Yes," he said, his countenance shadowed by some painful memory: "At Bullingham, in lodgings, with my mother. All through that summer she was ill, and in pain—agony sometimes. She pined, as your brother does, for country air; and I longed to get her to the sea. A little money was left to us; and

I hoped it might be: but there was some hitch—and we did not get the money. I got it afterwards: too late."

"And your mother—I remembered her—she was like a queen. And she died at those lodgings!"

"In the next winter. It will be seven years in February. Yes: she died there."

"Oh, if my Gerald should die!" cried Marjory.

The words broke from her in a passionate sob; she felt that she must get away, by herself, if she would escape a burst of weeping.

"Good-bye," she said hurriedly: "I can't talk any more. I want to be alone."

It was wonderful, she thought afterwards—at the time she noticed nothing—how instantaneously Hugh Vivian understood! He stood still, quite silent, and let her pass. Five minutes later, when she had conquered herself, she looked back; but he was not in sight.

CHAPTER IV.

"*Conrad:* How now? Who more than she, in faith and practice, a living member of the communion of saints?" *Charles Kingsley.* ("Saint's Tragedy.")

It was as though Majory's anticipations had carried with them their fulfilment. The very day after her talk with Mr. Vivian, the manager of the bank called again on Gerald, to offer now, instead of later, the month's holiday expected in October, adding, that should its close find him still disabled, his post must be otherwise filled.

The present holiday was a great relief; and Marjory felt more hopeful; for Gerald now consented to indulge his craving for the country. An idea had come upon him that country air was in fact the sole remedy he required.

"It will be a bore to break into my fund," he said; "but this is a case of penny wise, pound foolish."

The fund in question was the money laid by from the sale of his illustrations,—a

limited sum enough, though increasing; but on the other hand, the Thorne lodgings were, to town ideas, surprisingly cheap. Mr. Robinson pronounced the experiment to be well worth a trial, and himself undertook to superintend the difficulties of removal.

Mrs. Myers and Miss Pilkington had returned; the holidays were almost over; but Marjory's share was extended by the kind ladies. They, like Gerald, hoped great things from the change; and prophesied that he would return "quite himself." Meanwhile Lina, from Aberystwith, had proceeded to stay an extra week with a friend, and Marjory wondered at the equanimity with which this was endured by Gerald, until she found that he had written both to Lina and Mrs. Peele, pressing them to join him at Thorne. Mrs. Peele, who was still at Aberystwith, had promised her consent conditionally on Lina's. From Lina no answer had yet arrived.

"I feel hardly any doubt of her coming," said Gerald: "I wrote most urgently. I told her all that depended upon this change. The other day Robinson warned me against worry, and said that rest of mind was more important to me than medicine. I told her

this too, because I thought it would induce her. She knows what would give me rest!"

"I did not know Mr. Robinson had said that. Oh, I hope she will consent!"

"I can't doubt it—I won't doubt it," said Gerald: "If you had seen my letter, you would not. If she cares for me, she will come."

The last words were added after a pause, and in a different tone. Marjory knew not how to reply.

"Now sing, Marjory—don't let us dwell on anything disagreeable. I want to be happy for once. I want to think about Thorne."

So Marjory sang; and Gerald listened, and dreamed. His own expectation seemed to be that the free air, combined with Lina's presence, would act like magic; that the pain would cease, the fever pass away; that he would quickly gain strength, and roam with Lina through those fair places—hope and health alike renewed. So ran his vision; and Marjory breathed no word to gainsay it: only her heart ached strangely, as she sang the songs that he loved.

The next day, enclosed to Gerald, came the following note:—

UNIVERSITY OF

"The Lawn, Middlecombe,

"August —, 18—.

"My dear Marjory,

"I think you have my book of Old English Songs. Pray send it to me by post, as I wish to choose one for the Infirmary Concert here. I have been asked to sing, and must therefore postpone my return once more. You will, of course, see that this prevents my accepting your and Gerald's kind invitation. I never intended to be so long from home; and I fear that I shall find much neglected at St. Philip's; but this concert is in need of a good voice, and the Infirmary must not suffer. I hope that you will enjoy your visit to Thorne, and that Gerald will be greatly benefited, and, in haste,

"Believe me, dear Marjory,

"Your affectionate friend,

"Caroline Peele.

"P.S.—Be sure that you remember the Songs."

For full half an hour Marjory sat on in her room, the note in her lap, afraid to go back to Gerald. Her thoughts were full of Lina. Lina professed to aim at the highest standards; to live an exalted life, governed by reason and religion; to do always her duty, neither more nor less, superior to impulse. And the result was a block of ice! —marble rather,—for ice can melt. More and more she had hardened in her rigid mould; Marjory could look back and trace the process. Could it be that Lina, in her small way, was fashioning herself after the divine model? Was God but an infinite expansion of the same idea—pursuing one unswerving track, unmoved by the cries of His creatures? Almost it might seem so, Marjory fancied, as she remembered her prayers—Hugh—Gerald. But, if God indeed were but an antitype of saints such as Lina, she thought that she would rather be cast out with Hugh Vivian, than in Heaven with Him and them. It was one of those wild and desperate thoughts which had troubled her lately: which had made her shrink in fear from the untried possibilities of her nature.

In the sitting-room all was still. Gerald had not moved since she left him. She went

silently past him to the piano, and began to hunt for the book of songs.

"You can see my letter," said Gerald: "There is nothing in it that the whole world might not see."

Marjory took it, turning her back on him as she read. By the gentle reproofs and hints with which it was interspersed, she guessed the nature of that to which they replied. Gerald was exhorted to be calm, to study self-government, and thus to place himself in a condition to derive all possible benefit from the change.

"On yourself, far more than on me, dear Gerald, that benefit would in any case depend," was the tender warning.

Marjory made no remark, as she returned the letter; but afterwards she slipped away again, and wrote herself to Lina.

The answer reached her, by return of post, in the lodgings at Thorne.

"The Lawn, Middlecombe,

"August —, 18--.

"DEAR MARJORY,

"I am sorry that I cannot satisfy your—forgive me—exaggerated appeal. My

arrangements are now past alteration, even if that were desirable. I think you are mistaken in encouraging Gerald in what I cannot but regard as weak-mindedness. I shall quite hope to find him a different person when we meet again at Alton.

"Believe me, dear Marjory,

"Your affectionate friend,

"CAROLINE PEELE."

It was much as Marjory had expected; but she felt it none the less. She tore the note into a hundred pieces, saying nothing to Gerald, and burned it in the farmhouse kitchen.

For they were lodging in a farmhouse, old-fashioned and substantial, every corner of it spotlessly clean, every article in it polished to the maximum of brightness. Wholesome odours of hay, of new milk, of homely flowers, pervaded the atmosphere; sounds of lowing cows, of sheep, of poultry, made, from early morn to "dewy eve," a melody of their own. The rooms engaged by Bellhouse were in a gable older than the rest—large and cool, with dark panels and deep window-

seats, the windows overlooking the garden, where flowers, herbs, and vegetables grew in comfortable unanimity. Beyond, a part of the park and of the adjoining churchyard were visible. The music of the brook below the churchyard wall, that brook sought out by Marjory nine years before, was clearly audible in these rooms when the windows were open,—and at present they were open day and night.

The drive from Alton, notwithstanding Mr. Robinson's skilful escort, had been followed by severer pain; and more than once Marjory wondered whether, after all, their coming had been wise. Still the craving for the country was satisfied. Gerald could not wander at will among fields and lanes, sketching according to his fancy; but he was in their midst; they, and not streets, surrounded him: he could step straight through a glass door into the garden, where, under an ancient apple-tree, Marjory had improvised a couch on which he spent the greater part of each day. The farmer's wife overflowed with genial kindliness; dainty fare of all rural kinds abounded; and if cream and butter, new-laid eggs, and delicate fowls could have cured him, he would speedily have

been well. But, as day by day went on, he seemed to Marjory worse instead of better.

She could not seek sympathy from Bellhouse; for, a day or two before their arrival, Bellhouse had been summoned to a distant county, to the death-bed of her last surviving sister. So, when Marjory could leave Gerald, she roamed about the old park, as in her childhood, alone. Constantly an elevation in the ground, a turn among the trees, disclosed the grand old house, lying lonely and silent. She would sit at the foot of one of the mighty oaks, and watch that house of her dreams, as it rose beyond her, its many chimneys, gray and smokeless, standing out against the blue of the sky. Here she lived again the times when it had been full of gay company, and she, a stranger child, had admired from afar those denizens of the great world. She heard again their voices, the words they said, the songs they sang.

Then further into the past went her thoughts. She saw the children of whom Bellhouse had told her, flitting along the terraces, chasing each other through the gardens, picking wild flowers in the park. Miss Evie's face looked out from that window of

yore, and smiled as if it knew her. The little old lady came again in her black mushroom hat, and asked, "What little girl is this?" Where were they now, all these? Were they thinking still, loving still—somewhere? It seemed to Marjory that she had come into a world of phantoms; that the silent house and the park around it, the old trees, the wood-pigeons cooing from the grove, were themselves a part of that phantom world, and would presently fade like the rest.

She understood now all she had read of this fleeting world, of life's pilgrimage. A pilgrimage! but how long? How many miles of desert country? She was nineteen, and Gerald was twenty-three: just beginning, as it were! How could she bear the desolate years? As many a time before, the question struck her: If prayer bring no comfort for this world, where is its help? In Heaven no comfort is needed.

CHAPTER V.

"Enough ; so let us go, mine eyes
Are blinded by their tears ;
A voice speaks to my soul to-day
Of long-forgotten years.
And yet the vision in my heart,
In a few hours more,
Will fade into the silent past,
Silently as before."—*Adelaide A. Procter.*

One evening Gerald and Marjory were sitting under the old apple-tree. The day had been very hot ; now the sun was gone down, and in the far west all manner of soft colours glowed, changed, melted into one another. The air was full of fragrance, and very still. Now and then a leaf rustled, a thrush sang : while the brook, shallow, but still musical, trickled over its pebbly bed.

"What rest this is, after the town noises !" said Marjory. A book was open on her knee ; but for the last quarter of an hour her hands had been clasped over the page, her eyes and ears, with unconscious soothing, drinking in the quiet beauty around.

"It might be rest—it ought to be," said Gerald.

Marjory looked at him anxiously.

"Gerald, I cannot bear to see you like this; and it is very bad for your health. How can you get well while you are so wretched?"

"How, indeed!" he answered with a smile. "I suppose it is impossible. It seems so."

"But what is it? I only half understand. Are you fretting because—because Lina——"

He frowned, and turned away his face.

"Gerald, I can't bear it," cried Marjory, passionately: "I can't bear this silence any longer. You opened your heart to me before; and why not now? What is this between you and Lina?"

"Nothing but what you know,—or might know."

"You mean her coolness? Do tell me, dear Gerald—do pray tell me what is in your mind!"

"I can't talk about it—it maddens me. If I didn't keep it under, I should be a torment to you as well as to myself."

"Not to me, dear Gerald: never to me," cried Marjory, her eyes filling.

"You love me better than she does; I can see it. I have been a fool to close my eyes so long. But I thought—I thought——"

He broke off abruptly.

"Marjory, you mean it well, and I am grateful; but please question me no more. I am like a sick dog, turning savage if he is disturbed. Just leave me to myself, and forget me."

"As to forgetting—that is nonsense. But I will leave you to yourself, if you wish it."

"I do wish it. I am very sorry,—I pity you for being tied to such a companion. I will try to be pleasanter. Only don't mention Lina to me. Some day—when I have had it out with her—you shall know the result."

From that evening he exerted himself to be more talkative, less absent, and to show interest in the simple things around. But Marjory was not deceived; she saw, moreover, that the effort was beyond his strength. The fever-flush burned more brightly afterwards: he was more tired, more worn, when night came.

"Gerald," she said at last, on one of these nights, "I am sorry I asked you any ques-

tions. Please be as silent as you like. I won't interfere again."

"I beg your pardon," he said, wearily; "but the fact is, I am not myself; and, what is more, I cannot be till I have talked to Lina."

"She is at home now."

"Yes, I know. I suppose——Would it disappoint you very much if we went back a little sooner than we intended?"

"No, not that. What disappoints me is seeing you no better."

"I shall never be better with such a weight on my mind. I don't want to be selfish, Marjory; but the pain saps my strength—I can't master myself as I used. This gives me no rest, day or night."

She did not definitely understand; but remained true to her promise: and questioned him no more.

"If she had been with us;—if she had—had—all would have been different. In that case, I should have been quite strong again by this time."

"I hardly think that," said Marjory, gently.

"I am sure of it," repeated Gerald, with unwonted irritation; "And now, if I can see

her, and get this settled, I shall soon improve. I feel that Mr. Robinson was right. This worry is poison to me."

"Very well; I will send him a note to-morrow, when Mr. Brown goes to market; asking him to fetch you home."

"But not if it vexes you?" said Gerald, with sudden compunction.

"It could not vex me half so much as to keep you here against your will. So don't add that to your worries," said Marjory, forcing a bright smile.

Afterwards, alone in her room, she cried herself to sleep.

Almost the whole of the next day she was out of doors, making a farewell visit to her old haunts. Strangers would soon be in possession of those beloved places; she might see them never again, she thought, except in memory. In returning, she paused long near the familiar white gate, in the lane bordering the plantation. A gentle breeze stirred the tops of the larches, which had grown into tall trees since days of old; a squirrel hopped from bough to bough, and now and then a rabbit scudded through the brushwood. No human sounds were there; but Marjory saw once more, Jessie, in her

young beauty, searching for burdock roots, and heard her clear voice sing:—

> "He will return—I know he will—
> He will not leave me here to die."

Had those words proved strangely suitable to Jessie's future? She turned from the thought, oppressed by the sense of mystery. It was pleasanter to recall the other figure, the Mr. Hugh of that old time, chatting lightly to the fair girl in the plantation. But Marjory hardly knew why so sharp a pang pierced her spirit as the scene came back to her.

The wood-pigeons were cooing in the evening calm, when she went home. The farmer had returned from market, bringing word that Mr. Robinson would call for Gerald next day. Gerald was in better spirits than throughout their visit, as they sat for the last time under the apple-tree.

"If an earthly Paradise were possible," he said, "this would be a fitting scene for it. One might spend a very contented life here, 'far from the madding crowd.' Even death seems less gloomy than elsewhere; that old churchyard might have a tempting aspect to any one who longed for rest."

"You don't long for rest, Gerald?" cried Marjory, quickly, struck by something—she hardly knew what—in his tone.

"I? Not in that sense! No, what I long for is life.

> 'Tis life, 'tis life, for which we pant,
> More life, and fuller, that we want:'

—and I fret sometimes, because I can't get it."

"You may get it yet, perhaps," said Marjory, with a gleam of her old hopefulness; "Why, Gerald, nearly all the great artists—poets, musicians, painters—have gone through an apprenticeship of trouble! No doubt, when they were in the thick of it, things seemed as dark, as often now to us. They could foresee the end no more than we can; and yet what an end was in store for many of them! It may be the same for you."

"I suppose it *may*," said Gerald, dreamily.

"Think of what Mr. Harding said in answer to your note! I remember every word: 'Don't lose heart—the true stuff is in you, and somehow or other it will win its way.' Gerald, you have not forgotten?"

"No," said Gerald, in the same dreamy tone.

He was watching the sunset light, as it widened and deepened upon the old churchyard wall. Why, at this moment, did it kindle a moss-grown stone, whose inscription Marjory had to-day deciphered amid the stains of age.

"*He asked life of thee; and thou gavest him a long life; even for ever and ever.*"

So ran the words; she could not see them now, but, while the old stone glowed, they sounded, as if spoken, in her ear. She looked in a kind of tremor at Gerald; he was only intent upon the light.

"I should like to catch that effect," he said: "How curiously the silent radiance widens! There—it is going! If we sat here every evening for a whole summer, we might never see a glow like that again."

CHAPTER VI.

"Farewell! thou art too dear for my possessing,
And like enough thou know'st thy estimate:
The charter of thy worth gives thee releasing,
My bonds in thee are all determinate.
* * * *
Thus have I had thee as a dream doth flatter;
In sleep, a king; but, waking, no such matter."

Shakspeare.

The town seemed very close and dusty after the old farmhouse; and Gerald was much exhausted by the drive.

"It was a pity that you could not stay longer," said Mr. Robinson to Marjory; "Under the circumstances, I fear the move has done him more harm than good."

Nevertheless, at breakfast the next morning, he was in his usual place. His gray eyes were shining, his cheeks were burning, his face was set in stedfast resolve.

"I wish you had not got up, Gerald," said Marjory.

"Lina is coming. We must make haste. I expect her very soon."

"Why does she come so early?"

"She had no other time to spare," said Gerald, shortly. Not a word more passed between them throughout the meal. When it was over, Marjory quickly vanished, leaving Gerald alone.

Was Lina struck when she entered, some half an hour later? Did she see anything of an omen in those eyes which met hers? If she loved him, did not her heart beat faster as he clasped her hand? An old proverb says, "None are so deaf as those who won't hear." Another, equally truthful, might say, "None are so calm as those who don't feel."

"I had hoped to find you looking better," she remarked, in her clear tones; "I fear you came back too soon."

"It would have killed me to stay longer. I could not rest till I had seen you."

"So you told me in your note; but do you know, I think it is a pity? I think we should school ourselves to bear separation. How would it be if you went, as you planned, to Rome?"

"If!" repeated Gerald, with a strange mixture of longing and despair. "It is not the separation, Lina. I am not quite such a

poor creature! No—it is something to be decided, which has weighed on my mind, night and day. You see I cannot boast your self-control," he added, with a touch of bitterness. "My feelings are not so completely under my thumb, as to be summoned or dismissed at will."

"They are rather too much the other way, I fear," said Lina, sweetly: "Well! what has troubled you so much? I shall be glad to know."

"You have often reminded me, as a motive for calmness, that our engagement is not likely to be short. No more it is. But the question in my mind is not as to the shortness or the length of it, but whether there had not better be an end."

Lina looked at him. His eyes were fixed upon her, eagerly and with strange impatience. Her own beautiful eyes were not eager—nor perturbed. They were a little surprised,—a little—very little—offended: nothing more.

"Well?" he said quickly: "Well? won't you answer?"

"I did not know that you expected me to answer. It rests with yourself. I am willing to go on with the engagement, or not, as you think best."

"Is that all?" cried Gerald, passionately: "Lina, I cannot make you out. Is it that you are supernaturally perfect in the government of your feelings? or have you no feelings to govern? I'd rather know the truth. Speak out, and tell me."

"Gerald, you are really unpolite," said Lina, the shade of offence deepening: "I must beg you to explain yourself. In what have I shown any want of feeling?"

"You won't understand: or you can't; I don't know which. Lina, when I asked you to marry me, some day—far off, but real,—I was full of hope, though all was uncertain. Harding's praise had opened to me a future beyond my utmost dreams; I thought that there might be a few years of waiting—perhaps very few, and, if you loved me, they would soon pass—and that then—then I should be able to——." He paused.

"Oh, the visions I had! But never mind. Only, if they had come true, your position as my wife might be not altogether unworthy, even of you. I thought that, for the honour you had done me, I would give you honour again—that I would win riches, success, glory, and offer all to you; and it seemed—if you

loved me—I must repeat that,—I did you no wrong in what I asked."

"I have told you frequently that I have no objection to the long engagement," said Lina. She was about once more to repeat that her time was fully occupied at St. Philip's; but Gerald interposed.

"Well, let that pass! Things are altered now, Lina. The fates are dead against me. Poor Marjory's scheme has come to nothing: I have new plans of my own; but my health hinders them. Here I am, a wretched log—unfit for work of any kind. To own that fact is terrible! yet a fact it is. My bank appointment is as good as gone. What we shall do next, Marjory and I, Heaven knows—or when this knee of mine will be well. Sometimes I think it is a mere strain; and sometimes——"

"You are too desponding," said Lina.

"Am I? you could soon change that! I'll tell you what, Lina; You said it rested with me,—it rests with you. I am only putting things before you. If you wish still to stick to me"—his voice trembled, with a sudden possibility of joy—"you may, after all, not regret it. The tide may turn: surely it is nearly at its lowest—and then it may go

up. Often I think that, if my mind were at rest about you, I should get all right. Or, if not, and if you cared for me enough to bear it, I would just as soon lose my leg. There might be no other cure."

"My dear Gerald, what portentous views you take!"

A peculiar smile passed over his face.

"If you had felt for five minutes the pain I feel all day, your views might be portentous too! At any rate it is enough to convince me that this may have to be, that I may become a cripple;—I am only preparing your mind. But, when once the worst was over, I might soon be healthy and strong again; and, if Mr. Harding were still friendly, my dreams might even yet come to pass. It is possible: I dare not say more. So, Lina, now you see! Do you love me enough to face all this: or not?"

He looked at her, first red, then pale. Lina was silent.

"I must know," said Gerald: "I must have a final answer. The suspense and the bodily pain together are more than I can stand. It's not that I care so much about suffering; but I do care about my hopes: I can't let them go without a fight. I can't be

contented to die, when I might live. I must know the worst, or the best. If the best, I sometimes think that would cure me at once. If the worst, please God I will yet face it like a man. More than a man I can't be; if you are more than a woman."

His voice quivered as he spoke these last words; and Lina seemed slightly to melt. "I do not wish to pain you in any way," she said graciously.

"Don't think of that, Lina," cried Gerald, with sudden warmth: "Not for one moment! I would not for the world go on with this, but of your own free choice. When people really love each other, I know, through experience, parting is the one thing unbearable. But without love, without great love, it would be bondage indeed to be tied to such as I now am. I would not for the world expose you to it. And often lately, Lina, I have fancied that you had no such love for me."

"You are like Marjory, far too fanciful."

"Am I? Then I may have fancied more: I may have fancied you other than you are. I have thought, If such be the face, what must the soul be? what to have such a soul devoted to me, united with me! The idea

alone was rapture—till—till, slowly, other thoughts dawned. Mind! I am not complaining; I am only telling you what has filled my mind."

"I suppose you feared that I should break my word," said Lina proudly.

"I did not. I knew you were honour itself. I knew, unless I spoke, we should drag on as we have done lately. But I can bear even the worst better than that."

"I do not know what you mean by dragging. Certainly, as you say, our prospects are far from favourable; but, as regards your health, I have myself no doubt but that you will recover, without anything so portentous as you suggest."

"And what is your answer to my question?"

"My answer is, that I am willing, if you are the same, to continue without change for the present."

"For the present! What does that mean? On the chance that things may better themselves?"

"In that hope. I fully expect that you will some day be a celebrated artist. Of course, if this became impossible——"

"If I had no other prospect but to be tied

for life to a bank, for instance," broke in Gerald.

"Exactly. Should this eventually seem certain, it would be wiser, then, to part. In such a case you could never be rich; and, although I shall have a moderate income, it is never desirable that the husband should depend upon the wife."

"I see," said Gerald; "At last I see your heart. I thank you, Lina. You have spoken plainly, now."

"You asked me to speak plainly."

"Yes; and I am glad. I am glad to know. Once more, thank you. We should have had to part, sooner or later, no doubt; and now you have made me willing for it."

"What do you mean?" inquired Lina, with calmness.

"I mean that I release you. You need not fear that you have broken your word, I give it freely back."

"You wish at once to break off the engagement?"

"I do. There is no such thing as 'for the present,' with me, in such a case. It must be for ever, or not at all. Yes, it is all over."

"Certainly, since you desire it," said Lina,

rising; "But you would have done better to tell me your intention at first, and so save this discussion."

"My intention! I had none; except to find out this one thing, which now I know. I thought you were an angel, Lina! I blessed God for the day I first saw you. And now—this is worse than hell."

"Gerald, you quite shock me! I see that it is all for the best. If I had known you more thoroughly, I should never have consented to link my fate with so ungoverned a nature."

"Good-bye," was all that Gerald answered. As she rose, he had risen, forgetting his pain. Now, before Lina was aware, he had clasped her in his arms, with one long passionate kiss.

"The last for ever and ever," he said, letting her go: "Good-bye, Lina."

He turned from her, with iron self-control; and in stately silence she quitted the room.

When, her serene head somewhat higher than usual, she had traversed the long streets to Albion Square, she went straight to her own apartment, and found relief in shedding a few tears. Their source, which she did not analyse, was complex; they were soon

wiped away; and afterwards she was quickly herself again. She washed her hands, smoothed her hair at the glass, and repaired to the drawing-room.

"Mamma," she said, "I wish to mention that my engagement is broken off."

"My dear!" exclaimed Mrs. Peele, in utter bewilderment. None of the ups and downs, too well known to Marjory, had been apparent in Albion Square. The Peeles had grown to regard Lina's engagement in the light of an institution; fixed, and of indefinite duration—a pity, but irrevocable.

"Yes," said Lina, "Gerald thinks it wise; and of course I can only agree with him. His health and other uncertainties considered, the change, no doubt, is prudent. In mentioning it to our friends, mamma, I beg you will explain that there has been no breach of promise on my part."

"My dear child!" cried tender-hearted Mrs. Peele, temporarily moved from her respectful awe of Lina: "I sympathise with you so deeply! All has been so unfortunate! I trust you will not fret yourself ill."

"Pray do not feel uneasy, mamma," said Lina; "I hope I know better how to meet a trial than to fret myself ill."

As she spoke, she sat down at the piano, to practise for the Philharmonic Society. Occupation, as her father had taught her, was the best cure for sorrow; and a well-disciplined mind would never permit itself to brood over grief.

CHAPTER VII.

"I was not sad to die, for there was now
Nothing left in the world ;—but in a dream
I suffered ; . . . . . .
. . . and I thirsted more and more,
Burning and craving.
Again, again through all the long dark hours,
Always the thirst, the striving, and no drop
Once tasted. Was it hours, or days, or weeks ?
And once I came unto myself, and all
Was agony, past thinking and past speech."

Harriet E. Hamilton King.

All through the long afternoon, Gerald had been locked up in his room. More than once Marjory had listened outside ; but all was silence. Meanwhile the world went on as usual ; the blue sky stretched above the cathedral tower,—the bell chimed for even-song,—the quiet little congregation, ladies chiefly, passed through the low north door. The rooks cawed to one another ; wheels rattled ; footsteps tramped ; the river flowed with its wonted ripple. There was no pause in the great hum of life, because of one man's sorrow.

In the evening some relief came—a break in the silence. Gerald, after tea, remained in the sitting-room; and presently he spoke, unasked, and told her something of what had happened.

"There was no use in its going on," he said: "It has been a delusion all along. I can't make out, even yet, whether she has it not in her — or only not for me: but the result is the same."

"She is not worthy of you, Gerald," said Marjory.

"I am little enough to be worthy of!" said Gerald, bitterly: "But worthy of all I have felt for her, she certainly is not. Marjory! if I could but throw it off!"

"Throw off what, dearest?"

"My fascination for her. I can't help it, any more than she can help the other. While she seemed so high, so angelic, it ennobled me; but now it is only a clog. She is not what I thought her, and yet—yet—still I want her: I want her for my own."

"Dear Gerald, shall I go and see her? Shall I try to make it up?" asked foolish Marjory, thinking only how to bring him present soothing.

"No—No," he said passionately: "What

are you dreaming of? I did it of my own free will. I should have done it long ago, if I had known—if I had been certain. Many a time I have had misgivings; but I wanted courage to face them. I have my art still: that I can't be robbed of. I will reverse the poet's decision. 'O Love, my Love, thou wert much, but Art is more.' That is my opinion, Marjory—directly opposite to Mrs. Browning's."

He laughed as he spoke; and she thought that she would sooner see him silent.

"If I could get her out of my head—forget I had ever seen her! If she were truly what I thought her, whatever came between us, I would remember her evermore. But she is altogether another person. The ideal I dreamed of is as far off as ever. To think I should go mad about one like her! and yet I cannot help it."

As he talked on, Marjory doubted whether he were indeed himself. The wildness of manner, the fever of cheek and eye, seriously alarmed her. With some difficulty she persuaded him to go early to bed; and hoped to find him better in the morning. But, when morning came, he was very ill.

In reply to her anxious questionings, as she stood beside his bed, he could not tell whether he had slept or no. He had had a strange night, he said, full of visions. Even now he rambled, spoke strange thoughts aloud, or appeared to answer some person invisible to Marjory. One fact alone seemed certain,—he was in pain : pain so great that the mental anguish was lost in it.

"My knee is a burning fiery furnace," he said, turning his head restlessly, the fair hair tossed over the feverish brow : "Ten thousand flaming serpents with iron teeth! gnawing all night, and yet not satisfied. Who's that ? "

"Dear Gerald, it is I—Marjory."

"Just get Robinson to cut it off. The serpents are too much entangled—it must all come off together. They are writhing, I tell you! and their fangs burn. What have I been saying ? Marjory ? "

"Yes, my Gerald," said poor Marjory at his pillow.

"Was I wandering ? " he asked in his natural voice : "I'm so thirsty ! "

Marjory ran to the sitting-room, where breakfast was waiting, and returned with a cup of tea ; but he was all astray once more.

"Serpents — serpents," he repeated: "Burning and blazing. The cool sea, with tossing waves—and Venice in a flood of light. Too hot—the streets burn! I want water."

She gave him the tea in silence, feeling numbed at the heart.

"Thank you," he said, lying down again: "That was refreshing. I could sleep now, if these brutes—My head is all confused. What are these red-hot tongs at my knee? 'The worm that never dieth!' I'm not in hell, am I? Where are they—in my knee or my brain?"

He muttered on, unconscious that Marjory had flown in search of Miss Pilkington. Help was quickly at hand; Mr. Robinson summoned: and Marjory knew the worst. Violent inflammation of the joint had set in; an abscess, long smouldering, had been quickened to active mischief.

"You see he would not keep himself quiet," said the doctor: "The knee has not had fair play."

"And is he very ill?" inquired Marjory, white but tearless.

"I hope he will soon be better, with careful nursing. In a few days I shall lance his knee; and that will relieve him."

"Mr. Robinson, I beg of you to tell me. Is it a white swelling?"

"It is of that nature."

"And incurable?"

"Decidedly not incurable at present. I will not deny that he is in a critical state; but I see no reason against eventual recovery. In these cases so much depends upon the strength of the constitution."

"I will do all that is possible to strengthen him. Will he be long ill?"

"I fear it may be a long business altogether. This acute attack we can subdue; but the rest will take time. A few months —more or less."

"A few months!" Whence would the money come, to say nothing of other matters, for those months, with all involved in them? But she had no time to think of this now. She must at once set to work to carry out Mr. Robinson's directions for relieving Gerald.

Relief was slow in coming. Through nine long days Gerald lay racked in pain. At intervals he was quite himself, struggling to hide his agony, that Marjory might not be distressed. More often, as at first, he wandered amid delirious fancies, all coloured by

the feelings in his knee. And sometimes, most distressing of all, he moaned, his head turning from side to side, his arms tossing, his hands clenched, as if the anguish were unbearable.

Marjory would murmur, "Oh, my Gerald! Can I do nothing to help you?" Then he would come at once to his right mind, and say: "I beg your pardon—I am sorry I was so impatient."

But a few minutes later he was moaning, half unconscious, as before.

It was very terrible. All day, mechanically, her heart was crying, "O God, strengthen me! help me to bear it!" No visible answer came—no feeling of wonderful support—such as she had read of. Yet she did bear it, without breaking down, without distressing Gerald by weeping or complaint. Therefore, in the future, she believed that her cry had been answered. But, in the present, her feeling was—"All Thy waves and billows have gone over me!" Hopes of the past came back as though to mock her. As to Another long ago, mocking spirits whispered: "You trusted in God that He would deliver you! let Him deliver you now, if He will have you." In such a furnace had Hugh Vivian's

faith been destroyed: must the remnant of hers go too, she wondered? Thinking of him—as much for his sake as her own—she kept firm hold of it; and prayed, into what seemed empty air, that it might not utterly perish.

Tidings of Gerald's increased illness had rapidly spread; and friendly inquiries poured in from the outside world. Fruit and other sick-room delicacies were sent in abundance; and Mrs. Peele came to offer help in the nursing.

"You are very good," said Marjory; "but I don't know how he would bear to see you. It would remind him too much of Lina."

"Ah, yes, poor dear fellow! He has acted very sensibly; but I feared he would suffer. Lina told me that he could not feel it wise to continue the engagement under present circumstances."

"That is her view of it!" exclaimed Marjory, biting her lip, the next instant, at her unwary words. But Mrs. Peele did not observe them.

"After all, my dear, we must confess, when we think of it, that all is for the best. Lina does not allow herself to grieve. Such self-control may be beyond the reach of some;

but none the less should we admire it. And, since she bears up so well, I cannot but feel grateful for your brother's unselfish conduct."

Marjory felt strangely lonely as she listened to these polite gratulations. They were glad to be rid of Gerald, with all his wealth of talent and of self-devotion—better worth, as it seemed to Marjory, than mines of this world's riches. They could not appreciate him: only she in all the earth wanted him, and clung to him, and felt that death, to say nothing of poverty, would be joy in comparison to life without him. Kind and sympathetic though Mrs. Peele intended to be, and was, her visit left Marjory sadder than before.

She had taken it upon her to write to the manager of the bank, and had received from him a civil acknowledgment of Gerald's resignation, and a cheque for the amount due of his salary. From her uncle at Rockswold she had also received what money he could spare: a small contribution,—but welcome. He had sent it, he said, instead of coming, as a better means of aid: she might some day need him more than at present,—he would put off coming until then. Marjory

knew not why at these words a nervous chill ran through her! She tore up the note, and burned it, to get them out of her mind.

One day during this period another note reached her. Her colour deepened as she glanced at the signature.

"DEAR MISS STANHOPE,—

"It has grieved me, more than you would perhaps believe, to hear of your brother's illness. If I can in any way be of use to you or to him, pray remember that I shall be thankful to know it. Meanwhile, I am anxious to tell you that I have read your MS., and am more glad than surprised to find it full of promise. I think *you* would be surprised if you knew what a hold it has taken of me! When I see you, I can give you a hint as to re-casting certain parts; but, first, will you let me have the end?

"Yours very sincerely,

"H. VIVIAN."

Here was a gleam of comfort! giving her hope, even yet, for brighter times. She clasped the letter in her hand, as the renowned drowning man clasps his straw. Her story

was almost finished. She had been going on with it, by snatches, as she felt inclined; and now, while Gerald slept or lay silent, she wrote its final pages. She had no time to correct her work; it had come naturally, in the rough, from her mind—and so was left. She had written, as she was living, in the dark, "out of the deep," yet clinging tremulously, though with resolution, to the hope that somewhere beyond the darkness was light. Her meaning was confusedly expressed, she afterwards feared; but, such as it was, the manuscript went off to Mr. Vivian within a few days from his note.

Meanwhile, the crisis of Gerald's suffering was at hand. We read of great pain—we hear of it; but do we ever realize it until for ourselves felt or seen? Marjory, watching, found a new world revealed: a fearful world, enshrouded in mystery. Whence comes this capacity for pain, implanted in humanity? There are times when bodily pain is despised; it seems as nothing beside mental anguish. But see it in its intensity, and who will not own that even bodily pain is a formidable thing, an awful thing? Gerald's powers of endurance were weakened, his nerves overwrought; he could no longer strive for self-

command. In the night he would cry out, would start up in his bed, calling aloud on God to deliver him. Then, seeing Marjory beside him, he wrung her hand, and begged her to pray that he might die.

"And then you would be rid of me, too," he added, with a smile which cut her to the heart.

The opiates were increased, and gave him some rest; but, when he woke again, the struggle revived. As at first, his mind constantly wandered.

"Lina!" he said, one day, "Lina—Lina——"

Then came a pause, a deep-drawn sigh.

"Do you want anything, dear Gerald?" asked poor Marjory.

He raised his head slightly, looking round with something of expectation. This fading, he turned his face away and closed his eyes.

"I thought Lina was here," he said; "I only want Lina. If she could lay her hand upon my forehead," he went on, after long silence: "her cool, soft hand—it would heal me! The serpents would quail before her, drop away and die. I should sleep as in old days. I slept once, and walked about,

like other men, and worked, and lived. I was not always here among the flames."

"It cannot go on much longer," said Marjory.

"Would Mrs. Peele bring Lina to see me?" he asked, recalled by her voice. "The time has dragged so heavily since I saw her last. Would she come?"

"You would not wish it, after all that has happened," said Marjory, gently.

"Happened!" he repeated. "Has anything happened?" Then, suddenly: "I forgot," he said, in a dreary tone. "No—of course, she can never come again. It is all over."

As before, he turned his face away, and lay silent till the next paroxysm of pain. Marjory remembered how endless, a little while ago, even a fortnight had seemed to him. Now, as he had said, the separation would be, not for a fortnight, but a lifetime.

At length the worst was past. On the tenth day Mr. Robinson performed an operation upon the knee. Afterwards, for hours, Gerald slept, as he had not slept through all this time: a quiet, dreamless slumber. Awaking, he said, with ineffable relief, that

he was free from pain; asked for food, and slept once more.

"There is a good deal of vitality in his constitution," said Mr. Robinson, standing over him. "He will do now. Only build up his strength and keep him quiet."

And Marjory felt with thankfulness that the last injunction might now have some chance of fulfilment.

CHAPTER VIII.

"Father! forgive the child who fretted so,—
His proud heart yields,—the tears are on his cheek!"
Robert Buchanan.

Hugh Vivian's final departure had been accidentally delayed; but, shortly after Marjory had despatched the second part of her manuscript, she heard that he was absent on matters connected with some foreign adjutancy for which he had applied. September was well on its way before he returned. The excessive heat had long been over; already the early mornings and late evenings were sharp and chilly; and the first rich tints of autumn glowed on the trees. Marjory was alone, correcting divers scrawling exercises, when unexpectedly his name was announced.

"I did not know you were come back!" she exclaimed, with a thrill of joy.

"I came back late last night; and now—" He paused. "How is your brother?"

"Thank you, I hope he is better. I think so; and yet—I am not sure. At first he got on so well,—I was so hopeful! but

lately he has seemed at a stand-still. The pain is now very slight, and yet his strength does not increase. I wish he could be moved."

"And he cannot?"

"No. They wrote from Rockswold to beg that we would go home; but Mr. Robinson will not hear of it."

"I am very sorry. All this is not fit for you to be going through alone."

"Oh, as for me, it doesn't matter," said Marjory.

He looked as if he thought that nothing mattered so much! but he did not speak.

"I have wanted to tell you," she went on, abruptly and nervously, "that lately I have understood your difficulties as never before. I know now, as I could not then, what is meant by the battle of life; and how presumptuous those who only know it by hearsay are, to judge and lecture others in the thick of it. If I have ever talked pragmatically to you, I hope you will forgive me."

"You never have," said Hugh.

It was as though, for some reason, he could not trust himself to say more. Marjory had shrunk back with a hot blush; and a pause ensued.

"All this time you must have thought that I had forgotten your MS.," said Hugh, suddenly rousing himself: "But the truth is, I have been reading it again and again,—studying and thinking over it."

"You mean that really?" exclaimed Marjory, half incredulous, half delighted.

"I do, indeed. There is a great deal in it: more perhaps than you yourself know. I am thankful to have seen it. You will find that I have marked certain passages needing attention."

He unrolled the manuscript, which he had brought in his hand, and went in a business-like manner into the subject; criticizing, with here and there a touch of satire that made Marjory wince, but giving her valuable help.

"All this is my trade, you see," he said at the end: "I am pretty well skilled in it by this time."

He then told her of a publisher to whom he proposed to recommend the story.

"I shall prepare him to receive it in a few weeks from now; and, if you can alter these few points, I think it will be accepted."

"I will rewrite it altogether, and take the greatest pains. I don't mind how I work."

"Still at your old dream of helping Gerald!" He leaned back in his chair and looked at her, with a smile, half amused, half melancholy.

"It has been a dream, indeed, lately! But now you have given me hope. I don't know how to thank you."

"If I have been of any service to you, that is beyond thanks. I am glad to carry the thought with me: as a possibility at least."

"When are you going?" asked Marjory, with a sudden pang.

He paused a second, as if struggling to command his manner: then answered very quietly:—

"I am going to-night."

It was Marjory's turn to struggle now! to battle, with womanly instinct, against any betrayal of what these tidings were to her. Her heart seemed to stop beating, but he was looking at her,—she must speak.

"To-night?" she repeated.

"It seems sudden; but it must have come some time. Yesterday evening, when I returned, I found waiting for me a letter from an old friend in Russia. He says that he can find me work, if I will go to him at once.

The letter had been waiting several days; so there is no time for delay."

"And he does not mention any particulars of the work? You must have great confidence in him."

"I have—the greatest. He knows exactly what I am, and what I want. Granted the popular idea of Providence, his writing just now might well be called Providential."

"It is a long way to go," said Marjory.

"Yes; but that is for the best. I was up almost all night, thinking things over. If I leave Alton, I may as well leave England: otherwise I might be tempted to come back, which would be worse than foolish."

Before Marjory could answer, Gerald's crutch sounded in the passage. She started up to meet and help him; and the *tête-à-tête* was ended. Mr. Vivian stayed a little while —not long—talking to her brother. At last he looked at his watch, and rose to go. He shook hands warmly with Gerald; she heard Gerald wish him all good fortune; then came her turn. Speech failed her, shadows darkened before her eyes: she only felt her hand clasped fast and long, as if that hold could not loosen.

"Good-bye," he said.

She bowed her head slightly; but still she could not speak. Suddenly he raised her hand to his lips—for one instant: and was gone.

When, a minute later, Marjory turned round, Gerald, with his back to her, was looking out of the window; he did not seem to notice her, as she slipped away, leaving the exercise books strewn over the table. She must be alone, she felt. Why did she care so much? why was the whole world suddenly dark to her? It had been twilight before; now it was dark; she was sick of it, of everything. For eight years she had been happy without him: why had he crossed her path again, to pass as he came, changing all life? If she could still speak to him now and then, could know how he was, and where, could see his face at a distance, she thought that she should be content. But to live quite without him, without any knowledge of him—how could she bear it? And yet she must!

Already, by a habit which had become fixed, she was mechanically listening for his knock, his step on the stairs. And this craving must go on throughout her life: through long years slowly rolling—each made up of long months, weeks, days, hours. She had

plenty of work, of other interests ; but this would haunt her through them all. And, when earth's life was ended, would she meet him, even then ?

"Alas for divided hearts !
For the dreams that were only dreams !
'One taken, the other left—'
O saddest of human themes !

"I hear a spirit wailing—
'Heaven is no Heaven to me,
While I strain my eyes with gazing
O'er the parapet for thee.'"

O idolatrous words ! doubtless the true language of many a human heart,—but true for a time only, while we measure Heaven by earth. How must those who have reached Heaven indeed, marvel at that earthly childhood, which uttered cries so blind ! Yet Marjory's heart uttered them now, with a passion that terrified her. The cathedral bell had just ceased tolling for the four o'clock service. Her hat and gloves lay at hand ; mechanically she took them up : and sought a refuge in the calmness of God's shrine.

As she entered noiselessly, the congregation were beginning the Confession :—

" *We have erred and strayed from Thy ways like lost sheep :*

"*We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts :*

"*We have offended against Thy holy laws.*"

Who was that in a side aisle, kneeling with bowed head—joining in those words—praying, undoubtedly praying? It seemed to Marjory that she heard our Saviour's question, spoken once again as of old :

"O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?"

She had feared that her prayer was lost,—her childish prayer, begun nine years before —that little prayer, never forgotten, night or morning, for Mr. Hugh.

But now here he was at last, come home to his Father's House. Now, when she had felt most despairing, she saw him, kneeling before God.

* * * *

All through the service Marjory was constantly looking towards that distant form in the side aisle. The hard and bitter expression had faded from his face; it might return, but for the time it was gone. He was the Mr. Hugh of yore; only older, graver, "come out of great tribulation." Only a little while ago, the unbelief in his heart had seemed like a marble wall. He had breathed

in her hearing no suggestion of any change. Lina had told her that he never entered a place of worship; and this he had confirmed, observing that, whatever he might be, at least he was not a hypocrite. Marjory longed to know the cause of the transformation; but she would have no opportunity of asking. It might be that she would never know, in this world.

The service over, while the music of the organ rolled in glory from choir to nave, still he knelt, with hidden face. He did not know that any human eye observed him: rising at last, he looked neither to right nor left, but walked quickly away, with his soldierly tread, and through a distant door.

Then Marjory, reaching her own room unseen, thanked God with tears which, though her heart still ached, were sweet: a sweetness less of earth than of Heaven.

CHAPTER IX.

"The warm sun is failing, the bleak wind is wailing,
The bare boughs are sighing, the pale flowers are dying,
And the year
On the earth her death-bed, in a shroud of leaves dead,
Is lying.
Come, months, come away,
From November to May,
In your saddest array;
Follow the bier
Of the dead cold year,
And like the dim shadows watch by her sepulchre."

Shelley.

How to find money, not only for the exigencies of illness, but for common necessaries, had been of late a problem of painful anxiety. Gerald would have had Marjory return to Rockswold; but of this she would not hear. By extending her help in the school, which had been recently increased, to three additional hours, she was now able to provide for his lodging as well as for her own. The small but certain amount which he himself could earn, through his illustrations, and the law-writing recommended by Hugh Vivian,

was also useful; and from time to time some further help was sent by Mr. Stanhope. But, even with all these resources, they could not have paid their way, had not Marjory, after due consultation, been allowed to sell out a hundred pounds of her small capital. This necessity was equally deprecated by the uncle and by Gerald; but, that a necessity it was, she succeeded in convincing Mr. Stanhope at least. Gerald, however, announced that he should regard it as a loan, to be repaid when better days should come; and Marjory, smiling to herself, permitted the delusion.

Meanwhile, she worked hard and steadily in remodelling her book. Her progress was slow; for the afternoons were no longer her own,—and Gerald could not be neglected. But some progress she did make daily, and this work was an oasis in her life: both for its own sake, and for the hope which, phœnix-like, seemed about to rise from its ashes.

So the autumn weeks went by; the leaves deepened in hue, and floated away, "each to its rest;" and the old age of the year drew on, surely, though in silence.

Since his attack, Gerald had suffered no violent pain; it was now a chronic aching,

wearing but bearable. Sometimes, if he refrained from moving, he would feel little of it for hours. Marjory was continually expecting his strength to increase; her fears took no definite form, as the slow weeks went on.

Slow they were, despite her work: time dragged upon his course. She had to strive against an *ennui* of spirit which made her weary of Alton, of her walks, of the faces around her, of the whole world. Sometimes a step in the street, a voice at the door, would cause a throb at her heart; but in the same moment recollection came with almost physical faintness. He for whom she craved had passed into utter silence. He wrote to no one in Alton; it was as though he wished to be forgotten. Her only comfort lay in the secret hope of a meeting, one day, beyond the grave. Yet, when that dim and far-off meeting came, might it not find him without any memory of her? Perhaps long before then, some other might be all in all to him, might make him a fresh home, and comfort him for his troubles. She ought to hope it; and yet—oh, it was bitter, and hard to bear, this longing for a vanished face!

One afternoon, early in November, she and

Lina met accidentally on Heathcroft: the first time, since the breaking of the engagement, that Marjory had seen this object of her school-girl adoration. She had occasionally heard of her, as well and busy, and to all appearance unaltered. "Dear Lina bears up most beautifully," Mrs. Carberry had said, with mysterious nods and mournful smiles, in the course of a morning call. "It was all for the best, my love; and your dear brother's conduct was beyond praise," she added presently, in a whisper, in the passage. Gerald had certainly heard; but when, the visitor dismissed, Marjory glanced at him, his face was cold and impenetrable. She could not tell if he were pleased or displeased, or neither, by the gushing remark.

She blushed hotly, feeling not a little awkward, in encountering Lina to-day. But Lina looked serene, lofty, gentle; she might have been magnanimously forgiving some offence in Marjory, as she stopped and held out her hand.

"How is Gerald?" she asked with unmoved countenance; "I am sorry he recovers so slowly."

"Are you contented," said Marjory impulsively, as they walked on together, "to live

year after year, and never see him, except as a stranger, any more?"

"This is rather a peculiar question to come from you. Some might consider it insulting."

"Insulting!" repeated Marjory, aghast.

"It was Gerald, and not I, who broke off the engagement. I was quite willing to continue it for the present; his health might have improved. The sudden end was by his own desire."

Marjory stared at her, saying nothing.

"You would never have been a wife for Gerald," she was thinking: "Never, never, —if there were but you and he in the universe."

"To change the subject," said Lina, "Do you know what has become of Mr. Vivian?"

"He is gone to Russia," said Marjory; "He told us that work had been offered to him there."

"Have you any other authority for this?"

"His word is enough for me," said Marjory, proudly.

After a pause, significantly long, Lina continued:

"A short time before he left Alton, I happened to sit next him at a dinner-party. I do not know which of us was most disgusted

at first! but, on consideration, I found it a good opportunity to sound him about that photograph of Jessie Bellhouse."

"How?" asked Marjory.

"You know I told you that I had seen it before, but could not remember where. I remember now. It was in some house at Dover."

"By-the-by, you have a married sister at Dover?"

"Yes, I am going to her very soon, for a long visit. When I am there, I will hunt out that photograph; and more than that, if I can."

"But what did you say to Mr. Vivian?"

"I told him, casually, of my recognition of the portrait; and he laughed in his scornful way, and said that Jessie was probably not the only bride who had thus perpetuated her splendours. I replied that it was the face, not the dress alone, which haunted my recollection. And, in that very instant, I thought of Dover! It had not occurred to me before."

"And you mentioned Dover to him?"

"I did,—adding, that I intended to do my utmost to find some clue to the girl. I remarked, that you had told me of her disappearance, and that the story interested me: which is true!"

"What did he say?"

"His whole face darkened. Even you, partial as you are, would have been struck by it. Some bitter thought seemed to sting him."

"I have seen that look," trembled on Marjory's lips; but she did not say it.

"He observed, cuttingly, that I was extremely kind thus to interest myself in a stranger, but that he should doubt the advisability of my scheme. I asked whether he thought that the girl's mother would be of his opinion? He replied, that the question was, whether the girl's mother would be in any way benefited, if her present ignorance were enlightened."

"Perhaps he fears that Jessie may have come to some painful end."

"I do not pretend to know what he fears," said Lina, coldly: "I know only that his manner has more than ever convinced me of some mystery in his past life connected with Jessie."

"I cannot see what concern it is of ours."

"Of yours, I should hope, none. I only tell you to give you fair warning. It is curious, to say the least, that he should vanish so soon after hearing of my intentions."

"He has not vanished at all," said Marjory, "He is gone to Russia. And he sent in his resignation in May."

"It seemed quite providential," said Lina, ignoring this remark, "that I should happen to meet him. His friends lately have been observing that he had fallen back into all his unsociable habits. I was sorry, dear Marjory, to hear, from more than one, that this change seemed curiously synonymous with your close attendance on Gerald. This special dinner was at the militia Colonel's; so I conclude that Mr. Vivian made an exception in his favour," said Lina, sarcastically.

Again and again, when Marjory was alone, this conversation recurred painfully to her thoughts. And sometimes, at night, she dreamed of the Thorne plantations, and of Jessie gathering burdocks.

Meanwhile, each one of these waning days found Gerald more silent. What was he thinking about, Marjory wondered, as he sat hour after hour in his old position, surrounded by his materials for writing and drawing—working sometimes, pausing sometimes; as time went on, the pauses grew longer. In the evening, when his work was done, she would watch him, often for long

together, without his finding it out; and, as she watched, a swelling gathered in her throat, her eyes ached with tears suppressed —until finally she was forced to turn away. At this hour a book was usually open on his knee, and now and then he read; but more frequently sat gazing into vacancy, his arms folded, or his elbow resting on the back of the sofa, his head upon his hand. Those hands had still their look of nervous power, but they were very thin; his eyes had their old clearness, but with it blended a strange transparent light. His colour, though faint, was higher than in the days of his health; and sometimes it rose to a bright flush, which Marjory had grown to recognize as a signal of increased pain. Often, as he sat in that impenetrable silence, his expression was stern and resolute, as though he were dwelling upon some hard experience, and nerving himself to face it like a man. At other times it softened to a dreamy wonder, a musing speculativeness, which, more than all the rest, for some unanalyzed cause, filled Marjory with a nameless apprehension. Sometimes again, fixed melancholy, as of a baffled craving, would be for hours the predominant expression. Marjory passionately longed

that he would open his heart to her—that she might know, if but a part, of that hidden world; but she would not worry him by questionings.

One evening he had been glancing through the newspaper daily lent by Mrs. Myers. Presently, with abruptness, he laid it down, and turned from it, leaning his head upon his hand. Marjory, who had observed him, stole softly to his side, and ran her eye over the paper. The following paragraph fixed her attention: —

"The distinguished artist, Mr. Harding, R.A., sailed this morning from Folkestone, with a select number of pupils. The party will proceed to Rome, *viâ* Brussels, Munich, and Venice."

More followed; but this was enough: Marjory also laid down the paper. As she glanced at that face which she loved, so young, but so careworn—so full of genius, yet blank with the blankness of hope crushed down, her heart swelled in unutterable pity. The world's tide had been too strong for him: with all his wealth of cargo, he was swept away into the cruel waters: and no hand was stretched out to help. She stood at the window, her back to Gerald,

looking out behind the blind. The moon shone with a steady light above the cathedral tower. How many wrecked lives had ere now been looked down on by that cold and smiling face!

Twenty minutes later, she turned again to Gerald, and found him still in the same attitude, still with the same hopelessness on his face.

"Gerald," said Marjory gently, turning back into the room: "Are you worse to-night?"

"Not that I know of," said Gerald.

"I guess what you are thinking about,—I have seen the paper. Oh, dearest Gerald, do not let us give way like this! I think we are both too faint-hearted. Why should we cast off all hope? You can't go this year; but, at this time next year, you may be well and strong, and on your way. You may! Only think that it is possible."

"But it is not possible," said Gerald.

"You will not try to cheer up," said Marjory, reproachfully.

"It is not a question of will, but of facts: I must accept them, and so must you. I have said to myself over and over again, of late: I can never be a great artist—I can

never realize my ideal—I can never be strong or healthy, any more."

"You think that you will not get better?" said Marjory, very white.

"I don't think I am going to die—if you mean that. I feel nothing like death in me. But the spring of my strength seems dried up; I shall be better than I am now, no doubt,—in fact, I am better already. Creaking doors last for ever, you know. I may yet get through a quantity of bank business! but it will be as a poor lame wretch, always obliged to coddle and take care."

As he spoke, he met Marjory's eye, and smiled: a smile that said more than tears. "Gerald," said she, "if your theory be true,—that some are fated not to succeed,—where is God?"

"It does not shake my faith in God in the least," he replied: "It is His Will in the management of this world."

"But why? why?" she asked wildly.

"That is not for you or me to ask. We might ask for ever, and never find out: beating our heads against a rock. His Will is enough,—ought to be enough. It shall be, if I can manage it," he added, half under his breath.

"He is nearer Heaven than I!" thought Marjory: but her heart was still rebellious.

One day, a fortnight later, he said suddenly: "Did I hear you tell Mrs. Carberry that Lina was going to Dover?"

"She goes next week."

"I should like to wish her good-bye," said Gerald calmly.

Marjory looked at him, perplexed and troubled.

"You need not be afraid," said he, returning the look: "It is only because we may have removed to Rockswold—you and I—when she comes back; and, after all that has been, I should be glad of a more peaceful parting."

Marjory could not follow his injunction against being afraid; she was afraid—and anxious: but she undertook to make his desire known to Lina—who, somewhat to her surprise, responded readily.

"I have specially wished," she said, "to prove to Gerald that I have no resentful feeling towards him. There is no reason why henceforth we should not meet quite comfortably, as friends."

"It will not be too painful to you?" said Marjory, with some inward malice.

"I hope I have better command of myself than that," Lina replied.

She accompanied Marjory forthwith to the College Yard, observing that no time was like the present. When they approached the house, Marjory ran on to prepare Gerald; but the meeting had been so much in his thoughts, that he was not taken by surprise. He laid down his book quietly, and looked up: the glow upon his face alone revealing that this was no common visit.

"Pray stay, Marjory," said Lina, as Marjory was moving towards the door; "I may not see you again before I go."

So Marjory remained, and forced herself to converse on ordinary topics. Lina's comportment was exemplary; she was affable, gentle, and serene. She condoled with Gerald on his long imprisonment, informed Marjory of various devices which were to beguile to St. Philip's the blank of her absence; she remarked on the weather, on town affairs, —all with unruffled self-possession. Was it acting, or reality, or both? Was nothing deeper underneath? or was all too deep to be revealed? Had she forgotten Gerald's passionate love, his hopes wrapped up in her? or could she banish their remem-

brance at will? All the force that Gerald possessed was needed, Marjory saw, to maintain his calm of countenance, to withhold his voice, his eyes, from saying what he would not say in words. He could only answer yes or no, or make now and then some trivial remark. But Lina's easy conversation never flagged throughout the half-hour of her stay.

She stayed an exact half-hour, measured by her watch. At its termination she rose; and for the first time, save in casual glances, her eye met Gerald's. Suddenly even her composure appeared about to give way. Those gray eyes were so bright, so clear, as though a spirit from another world were gazing through them; the flush upon the thin young cheek had an unearthly radiance; the fair hair clustered round a brow stamped early by thought and suffering. This young man who had loved her, was no ordinary man. That thought struck her with renewed power. Did it strike her also that he was one to be clung to for life or for death? that death itself could not part a soul like his from a kindred heart that loved him? At all events she coloured, and seemed moved; and therewith the old craving woke again in Gerald's face. In another moment, had she

responded ever so little, he would have clasped her hand, and cried—"Come back to me, Lina—Lina!" But, even while the rose hue deepened upon her face, her calm voice spoke and said:

"Good-bye, Gerald. It is a great satisfaction to feel that we can now meet on comfortable terms."

He made some inarticulate answer. She pressed his fingers, with conventional touch, kissed Marjory, and, turning at the door to bow and smile, passed affably away.

"Marjory," said Gerald, suddenly, the same evening, as he lay looking out at the stars: "If I were skilled in sculpture, I could take a block of stone and carve it into a beautiful face, and impart to that face a look, as they say, 'full of soul.' And yet, all the time, beneath, would be stone — only stone."

"And the stone could not help itself," said Marjory, vaguely.

"No—and one could not blame it. Or, if one did blame it, where would be the use? But suppose it were so life-like that some poor fool set his heart upon it, thinking it a woman? He would have to own his mistake at last: and yet the power and

the charm of it, deception though it were, might have grown too strong to be cast off."

It seemed to Marjory that her brother drooped more visibly from that day.

CHAPTER X.

"Take me away unto Thy sleep, O God!
I thank Thee it is over."

Arthur H. Clough.

On one of the last days of November, Gerald had worked harder than usual, to complete a copy required by the solicitor before the evening post. It was finished and sent off, and he was resting, when a sudden faintness seized him. Marjory, alarmed, at once despatched Priscilla for Mr. Robinson; Miss Pilkington meanwhile administered remedies; but the faintness was slow to yield. They conquered at length, however; colour and life returned: and he rebuked Marjory for troubling the doctor.

"I was only a little over-tired; I am all right now," he said.

He would not go to bed, and, when Miss Pilkington had retired, sat reading quietly, his sofa drawn near the fire. Marjory, seeing him content, forgot her anxiety in a pleasant dream of her own. That very day her story

had been posted to the publisher recommended by Hugh Vivian. Her second venture was made; and, as she thought of it, she felt more hopeful than for months before. Gerald did not yet know what she had done; and now, as she sat opposite to him, she was picturing his pleased surprise when, in a week or two, he should find that at length she had gained an entrance to the world of literature. At last, at last, "after many days," might come the object for which she had toiled. Surely, when Gerald found that she had begun to succeed, he would take heart again, and with renewed hope his health would revive. She was smiling to herself at the thought, when Mr. Robinson's ring was heard. She, too, as she looked at Gerald, thought that it had been hardly necessary to send for him to-night.

He entered with his usual cheerfulness, but looking keenly at his patient, and, drawing a chair into the glow of the firelight, sat down to hear Marjory's report.

"He has been working too hard," he said, when it was finished: "that's the secret. He is not up to much closeness of application."

"But I have often done three times as much,—and since my illness," said Gerald.

"That may be. You can't do it now, though. You see he is very weak," he added, turning to Marjory.

"I wish you would give him some exact rule, Mr. Robinson. He is so obstinate: I can't manage him."

"He ought to do nothing for which he is not inclined; and sometimes nothing at all: he should go entirely by his feelings. Mind! your physical feelings, I mean," said the doctor, smilingly, to Gerald; "Your mental feelings are not to be depended upon."

Mr. Robinson's visits were never of long duration. In a few minutes he rose to go, leaving medicines to be administered, should the faintness return, and promising to "look in" next day. Something indefinable in his manner, as he looked at Gerald, had sent an awful apprehension through Marjory. She followed him from the room.

"Mr. Robinson," she said breathlessly, pausing at the head of the stairs, "I want you to tell me the whole truth about my brother."

"It is late now," said the surgeon, looking at his watch. "I will see you to-morrow."

"I cannot wait till to-morrow—I can't

bear the suspense. I implore you to tell me at once—the whole truth."

"Truth is sometimes painful," said Mr. Robinson, gravely. He still looked carefully down, as if not wishing to meet her eye.

Marjory trembled from head to foot.

"You mean that Gerald is very ill?" she said, clasping the banisters.

"While there is life, there is hope," replied Mr. Robinson.

"And that is all you can say?"

"He will be spared much pain," said the doctor, evasively. "He could never have been strong again."

"And—and—how long?" gasped Marjory.

"With care he may go on two or three months. But very great care is required."

He paused a second. Then, as Marjory made no answer, he looked at her at last with true concern.

"You insisted on my speaking plainly, Miss Stanhope."

She bowed her head.

"You need not be alarmed—I mean, there will be nothing sudden."

Then, turning, he went quietly away. How

often before had a like task devolved on him ! To him this fleeting life was only one among many. But to her—— !

She stood aghast, dumb and motionless, as he had left her : until Gerald's voice called from the sitting-room.

"Marjory ! Are you there ? I want you."

Mechanically she went.

Gerald had thrown his book aside; his eyes were shining. He looked as he had looked when Mr. Harding praised his genius, when Lina promised one day to be his wife.

"Marjory," he said again, "the door was a little open ; and I heard. Come here to me."

In the same mechanical manner she obeyed, and stood before him. The colour was all gone from her face, even from her lips.

"You are glad ? " she gasped, meeting his eyes. For he looked glad : he looked even transported with gladness.

"Yes," he replied. "How can I help it ? I don't want to be selfish—yet it is not altogether selfish,—for this will be better for you too. Yes—when it is over, when you are used to it—far better ! Marjory, how can I help being glad ? "

As he spoke, he took her hand, and drew her to a seat at his side.

"Listen to me, dear Marjory. Only think! I could never have been strong again: he said it,—and I have felt it, many a time. A weak woman is bad enough; but a weak man!—and a man forced to struggle with the world, even with starvation—and in that struggle to crush down the cravings for higher things which all my life have been my blessing, and yet my sorrow. My heart has sunk within me, thinking of it, realizing the future. What is there in this world worth living for, Marjory, to me? I have tried—I have fought and struggled to resign myself to God's Will; but now I find that God has been better than my fears. The cup that seemed so bitter is taken away,—the worst is over—beyond are rest and Paradise,—Marjory, how can I help being glad?"

But Marjory threw her arms around him, and clasped him passionately, as if to hold him back from the grave.

"Gerald! Gerald!" she cried, "My book went off only this morning; and this time there is every hope for it, and I had thought—I had meant—Oh, even if you

could not be strong, you might have been happy yet! Oh, it is hard—it is cruel."

"My dear Marjory, I would pray to live, if only for your sake. But I think it would be asking a miracle."

"Oh, yes; there is no use in praying—none! I can never believe in it any more."

Then she sat up suddenly, startled by her own words. Gerald laid his hand on her shoulder, with that touch which had soothed her so often.

"You are over-tired," he said, affectionately; "I wish you had not spoken to Mr. Robinson. Do go to bed, dear Marjory, and forget it for to-night. I am so sorry—you are tired and worn-out."

"I won't make you worse, at any rate," said Marjory. By resolute effort she commanded herself, went with him to his room, and bade him good-night as usual. But afterwards, when she was shut up alone, the storm had its vent. She threw herself upon the floor, and lay there prostrate in her agony.

"My God! my God! why hast Thou forsaken me? Why hast Thou deluded me?" she cried. It seemed to her that she

was alone—alone in the universe. Her sobs and tears went forth into the silence of the night. Like a wave, she dashed herself against the rocks without impression. There was none to heed; and the great world rolled on.

CHAPTER XI.

"The fame is quench'd that I foresaw,
The head hath miss'd an earthly wreath."

Tennyson.

The young life, in itself so gifted, so blighted in outer circumstances, was passing away; not painfully,—its chief pain, whether of body or of spirit, was over:—passing from a world which had dealt roughly with it. Continually was Gerald's mind now haunted by the words, "The days of thy mourning shall be ended." For him those days had been many. From the time when, in early childhood, he had been parted from his home, and all whom his baby heart had loved, he had found life an uphill way, full of disappointment, of care, of uncongeniality. Now, as he looked back, he remembered his boyish efforts towards the paths of the great masters in art, his discouragements, the strong purpose which had gradually died into less of a purpose than a hope—a hope unsteadily glimmering until at length he had striven to think of it no more. All now appeared to

him as in manhood appear the troubles and dangers of infancy. Those "days of his mourning" would never have seemed so terrible had he known how closely they were numbered. The bitter cup had been bitter unto death; but now it was almost drained. He felt like one on a weary journey, expected to prove long as weary, who turns an unlooked-for corner of the road, and, lo! his home is in sight.

That feeling of fulness of life was still powerful within him. His brain was unaffected, and even clearer than in the days of his health. No fear or shrinking shadowed the newly-kindled radiance; he had suffered too much in this world to dread the change to another.

One afternoon, Marjory, when she left the school, found him absorbed in a book, and, leaning over his shoulder, read these lines from Keats:—

"Bards of Passion and of Mirth,
Ye have left your souls on earth!
Have ye souls in heaven too,
Double-lived in regions new?

Yes, and those of heaven commune
With the spheres of sun and noon;

With the noise of fountains wondrous
And the parle of voices thund'rous ;
With the whisper of heaven's trees
And one another, in soft ease
Seated on Elysian lawns,
Browsed by none but Dian's fawns ;
Underneath large bluebells tented,
Where the daisies are rose-scented,
And the rose herself has got
Perfume which on earth is not ;
Where the nightingale doth sing
Not a senseless, trancéd thing,
But divine, melodious truth ;
Philosophic numbers smooth ;
Tales and golden histories
Of heaven and its mysteries.

"Thus ye live on high, and then
On the earth ye live again ;
And the souls you left behind you
Teach us, here, the way to find you
Where your other souls are joying,
Never slumber'd, never cloying.
Here, your earthborn souls still speak
To mortals, of their little week ;
Of their sorrows and delights ;
Of their passions and their spites ;
Of their glory and their shame ;
What doth strengthen and what maim :—
Thus ye teach us, every day,
Wisdom, though fled far away."

"That is a fine thought," said Gerald, repeating, as he pointed to the page,—

"'Where the daisies are rose-scented,
And the rose herself has got
Perfume which on earth is not.'"

"How wonderful!" he said, dreamily, leaning back in his chair.

Marjory noticed what joy was shining through the clear gray of his eyes. A thought struck her. She had prayed for his happiness: was not the prayer answered? Not as she had hoped, but no less certainly. She could not rejoice; her heart was still as a cold stone: but she acknowledged the fact.

"Here is another," said Gerald, turning over the leaves.

"'My days among the Dead are past;
Around me I behold
Where'er these casual eyes are cast,
The mighty minds of old:
My never-failing friends are they,
With whom I converse day by day.'"

"Southey is speaking of his books there," said Marjory, drearily.

"Yes,—of the soul in them. 'The mighty minds of old.' I couldn't explain to you, Marjory; I have no words to utter my wonder when I think of those 'mighty

minds'—all the hosts of them: and that I shall soon be with them. I try to realize it; but the marvel grows like a dream. Great artists, poets, philosophers — great spirits of all kinds. Here is so much delusion!—but there, none. No disappointment —no false ideals. What will it be? It is beyond conception!"

Again a thought struck Marjory. Would he have known this happiness if her prayer had been answered literally,—if he had been in the way to gain his heart's desire, a brilliant earthly future before him? How would death have seemed to him then?

As though he read her thought, he spoke and answered it: pausing at times, as ideas crowded on his mind.

"Marjory, the time of our death is fixed of old, from the beginning. God knew that I was to die early, so He prepared me for it. All my life has been leading on to this. —God has been very merciful—far beyond my thought: far beyond yours, Marjory. He would not let me grow wedded to this world; He spared me that hard wrench. Suppose I had been on the point of going to Rome; suppose Lina—Lina had been all I dreamed of, death would have

been the King of Terrors indeed! Now he has no terrors."

Marjory was long silent, resting her head upon her hand.

"Yes," she said at last, "I see that. But God is Omnipotent. He could have given you success and life both."

"But, after all, what is success in this world?" said Gerald, dreamily: "Always some flaw in it, some bitterness, some care. No perfectness in oneself, or in others, or in things. Oh, Marjory, far better to leave it, and seek success in heaven!"

So he felt, to the depths of his heart. All ambition was gone from him: or rather, it was already transplanted to the paradise for which he was bound. Once more Marjory remembered her passionate entreaties that Gerald might be blessed, honoured, glorious. She had feared, a while ago, that they were lost. But now, as she watched him fading, all that was mortal of him dying as it were by inches, yet content, with a contentment often rising into rapture, the past forgotten like a dream:—now, evermore and more, she saw that they were not lost. Far beyond their dim scope they had been answered, with an answering which would echo through eternity.

"I thought my love for him and my prayers for him were all unselfish," she cried; "But no—they were selfish to the core."

And still, as she went about her daily work, her heart felt like a stone.

Meantime Gerald wanted for nothing which the kindness of friends could supply. As before, outward sympathies abounded; while at home, the good ladies were ever ready to help or advise. Marjory was thankful for all; but these things brought her no comfort. She could never, she thought, feel comforted again.

Letters, frequent and tender, came from Rockswold; and Mr. Stanhope promised to hold himself in readiness for her summons. But Marjory as yet assured herself that any need for such summons was far distant. One day, soon after the declaration of Mr. Robinson's verdict, she received a note from Miss Peele, announcing that, if Gerald had no objection, Mr. Throckmorton would like to call upon him. No question of clerical interference was involved, since the rector of the College Yard district was non-resident; Gerald accepted the offer; and thenceforth Mr. Throckmorton visited him regularly. A magnetic attraction, founded, as Marjory sur-

mised, in mutual sympathies respecting Lina, drew them together. At one time Gerald had mistrusted the priest; he now discovered that this mistrust had been wholly unfounded. On the other hand, Mr. Throckmorton—who had approached the young bank clerk through a medium of patronising compassion—grew to reverence him with reverence not unmingled with wonder, and often, when he left him, felt that he had gained more than he imparted—that a spirit higher than his own was here in training for Heaven. In various points of ecclesiastical theology, their opinions differed; Mr. Throckmorton thought Gerald dangerously tolerant,—Gerald thought Mr. Throckmorton narrow. But the great essentials, which cannot change, formed common ground, where they met in perfect unity. Mr. Throckmorton's range of vision widened in more directions than one, as he found the growth to which a soul can attain, independently of certain aids which he had hitherto esteemed indispensable. Moreover, although Lina's name was never directly mentioned, his intercourse with Gerald revealed certain facts regarding her, which led him to doubt whether his criterions of holiness had been altogether correct!

One anxiety still troubled Gerald's mind: the payment of his debt. The will had provided that, should he die prematurely, deficits must be supplied from Marjory's legacy. This necessity grieved him sorely; the more, since her small capital had been already reduced in his behalf. But one December afternoon, he was equally mystified and surprised by a note from the solicitor, Mr. Grove, informing him that the debt was paid. The transaction was under seal of strictest confidence; Mr. Grove was only at liberty to say that the sum in full had been sent to him by one who wished it to be regarded as a tribute of respect to Mrs. Wilton.

"Perhaps some old friend of our grandfather's," said Gerald, when he and Marjory, vainly striving to elucidate the matter, had gone over the whole list of their acquaintance.

"I cannot at all make it out," said Marjory; "Are you sure that we are right in accepting it?"

"We have no alternative," said Gerald; "The thing is done. Here, you see, is the formal receipt."

"I suppose our grandmother had old friends who might have done it?"

"Oh, yes—she used to talk of no end; old sailors, too, shipmates of our grandfather's; some were at her funeral. Perhaps one of those has come into a fortune,—I can think of no one else.—But how wonderful, that this should happen now!"

"It is too late," said Marjory.

"Don't say that," said Gerald, gently; "It has taken an unutterable load off my mind. This debt was the one anxiety I had left,—and now it is gone."

Marjory made no reply. She only rested her head upon the arm of his chair, that he might not see her face.

"I have no anxiety about you," he went on, after a long pause; "You will be happy."

Still she did not answer. Happy! There was no such word for her, now.

"I feel as sure of your earthly future, as of my own beyond earth. Things which you don't dream of are in store for you."

"Are you turning into a prophet?" said Marjory, trying to smile. She would let him have his way. It was better that he should not even guess at her desolation.

Over and over again, for days, he was saying: "What a relief that the debt is paid!" More than once he said: "Marjory,

you used to pray that this might be; and here is the answer."

"I prayed—but not for this," said Marjory.

"Not for this!" she repeated, from inmost depths of agony. It seemed almost a mockery that the answer should come now!

One day she asked Gerald if she should write to Lina, telling her of his state. He hesitated a moment; then a flush, like a sunset cloud, crossed his brow.

"No," he replied; "I'd rather not. She would answer; and it would only revive ——" He paused.

"I shall be disenchanted in Heaven, Marjory," he said, with a sudden smile; "But never, quite, till I am there."

About this time his pictures were brought down from the attic, and, as he had strength, he looked over them, arranging all in order. Many he wished to burn; but Marjory would not hear of this; every line of every one was sacred to her. The "Bridge" was still unfinished; and thus it must be left; he would never paint again on earth. The "Ideal," filled in with Lina's face, was in a cupboard in his room. He took it out, and gazed long

on it in silence. Then, turning to Marjory, he showed her the figure's uplifted hand.

"You see it points higher," he said, calmly, and laid the picture aside among the rest.

He referred in no way to Lina any more.

Towards the middle of December the publisher wrote, accepting Marjory's story, and offering liberal terms. She laid the note down upon the table, and turned away sick at heart. But Gerald took it up, and his whole face lighted with pleasure.

"Marjory! this is famous! Did I not tell you that you would succeed at last?"

"I don't care for it now," said Marjory. She could not say more; she went away to her own room, and shed tears that seemed like blood drops wrung from her soul.

She remembered that Hugh Vivian had told her of some help which he had hoped for, and prayed for, in vain; and which had come afterwards, too late.

Too late!

"Lord, if I lose all else, save my faith!" she cried, as those bitter tears flowed on.

CHAPTER XII.

"My blood makes shuddering leaps, as alone in my dark I think
Of my own white stag whom the pitiless archers wounded sore,
My royal eagle whose plumes were all bedabbled in gore,
My strong one whose prideful locks of glory and power they shore—
And the iron enters deep to my soul, and I shudder and shrink,
And the bitter and awe of death are in the cup that I drink."

E. H. Hickey.

In a sick room, life appears as a dream. The days of the past, the commonplace days, with their employments, interests, joys, and sorrows,—days of health, when sickness was to us an empty name, pitied from afar: these are all as a vision that is gone. The busy world without, of which we hear the sound, seems but a pageant—a temporary stage, on which the players come and go. To this they will all come, sooner or later; to these four walls, this helplessness, this slow decay, —with Eternity beyond. Or else they will

pass suddenly into that Eternity, find suddenly how vain was the show. Eternity! In a room of sickness, nigh to death, what is anything in the whole great world beside Eternity?

Realities close around us like mighty shapes, as hills emerge from twilight into dawn. The petty ambitions and conventionalities, the civilities and slights, melt into nothingness. How did we care so much for them? When this beloved one, by whom we watch, is gone, and we return to them, how small they will seem! What is it to this fading life whether in our world it were high or low? If such and such a grandee of earth favoured or cut him dead—if so and so called on him, asked him to dinner, or the reverse,—either way, how does it matter? What child's play all alike seems here! Whether this or that plan or speculation succeeded,—whether he gained such or such office or high place—what does any of it signify now?—What the Judge, before whom he is summoned, will say: this is the one point now. What is written of him in the great Book above, how the high ones of Heaven will regard him,—where they will place him: nothing short of this matters now,—to him.

Slowly, and by degrees, as the days went on, and, holding Gerald's hand, she went beside him ever deeper into the Valley of the Shadow of Death, the fact already suggested impressed itself on Marjory's mind: that God had answered her prayers for Gerald in a way higher than she had dreamt of, than she could even as yet comprehend: a way that for him was "far better," if not for herself:—and she had wished not to think about herself.

More and more clearly, with her reason, she saw it; yet with her heart she could not rejoice: that stone-like anguish did not melt. She traced the Hand of God, but could not acknowledge it to be a Hand of Love. The path of pain in which so often it is His Will to work, excited a feeling of despair, of mute rebellion, which she controlled, but could not conquer. All the other breaking hearts in this wide world, all the other lifelong partings, all the other blighted hopes, all the other dying beds, arose as in a vision before her. It seemed to her that the ways of God were hard, were terrible. She could no longer think of Him as "Our Father."

Towards the end of December, very cold weather set in; an icy wind blew, followed

by snows and frosts. Many said that this was all the better, that there would be "an old-fashioned Christmas;" and healthy people seemed the healthier from the bracing of the clear sharp air. Marjory saw bright girls, wrapped in furs, and glowing with exercise, walk briskly through the College Yard. She saw athletic young men, and rosy boys, brimful of life and vigour, their spirits heightened by the combat with the cold. But Gerald withered and drooped beneath the severity of the change; it seemed to her that each day since it began, had made him a little weaker, a little thinner. Still, Mr. Robinson had spoken of two or three months —two or three months, with great care. And had he not had great care?—the very tenderest, the most watchful. But if possible, that care was redoubled now: she would hold him back as long as she could. The thought of parting with him grew continually more terrible. All through the last few weeks he had been so kind, so gentle, so sympathizing: he was so considerate of her, so careful to save her, so anxious that she should not be over-tired! How she would miss him! She could not realize, she dared not, half what that missing would be.

About this time she received a letter from Bellhouse,—a letter not remarkably legible, but full of motherly kindness. It came like a waft from a far-off Eden, but only sent a sharper pang through Marjory's heart, as she remembered how little in those Eden days she had guessed at the weary life before her. In the course of the letter Bellhouse mentioned that a purchaser had turned up for Thorne. Mr. Crawford had been down, and had said that there was little doubt of a final arrangement; but the gentleman was obliged to wait some weeks before deciding. He had not mentioned the gentleman's name.

"I hope it is some one who will care for the old place," said Gerald, dreamily: "Marjory, I have so often thought of that old churchyard at Thorne."

She sat motionless, staring into the fire.

"I should like,—if it did not cost very much—I should so much like——"

Marjory burst out suddenly, with an irrepressible cry.

"I understand," she said. "You shall have all you wish. But, oh, Gerald, don't! I cannot bear it!"

He laid his hand gently on her head, as

she sat on her old stool beside him. After that they were both long silent.

The Christmas holidays began ; and Lewis Harding came from the other house to wish his hero good-bye. Gerald had a parting present for him,—a cast-off paint-box, brushes, and drawing book ; and Marjory went to her own chamber, leaving the two alone. Some time afterwards she heard the boy steal softly out of the sitting-room : and caught a stifled sob.

" Good-bye, Lewis, "she said, going out to him. He was leaning on the banisters, a spotted handkerchief in his hand.

" Hollo ! " said he, looking round, with an effort at bravado : " Miss Stanhope, you must have cats' feet ! I never heard you. Good-bye. I say—Miss Stanhope ? "

" Yes ! "

" He'll be better "—the red head jerking towards the sitting-room door ; " He'll be better, won't he, when we come back ? "

Marjory tried to answer ; but words failed. The boy turned sharply, and choked in his spotted handkerchief, and shuffled out of sight to hide the tears he could not restrain.

The place was, as usual, very silent when the boys were gone. Mrs. Myers and Miss

Pilkington remained, for Marjory's sake. She saw little of them, but there they were—ready to help when help was needed: had they gone also, she would have been desolate indeed.

Christmas Day came, and passed. In the morning the sun shone brightly on the snow, and for one instant Gerald opened the window to hear the organ in the cathedral. Marjory fancied that in doing so he caught cold. Certainly, a few days later, she saw that his breathing was oppressed—and that he coughed:—he had never coughed before. He seemed weaker too, but for her sake fought against it, forcing himself to rise by nine o'clock each morning, and to sit up, as usual, until night. Marjory never knew how great was the relief when she proposed that he should lie in bed for a day, to nurse his "cold." For the last forty-eight hours he had felt hardly able to hold up his head; but in bed he was quite comfortable; a cheerful fire blazed in his room, and Marjory made it very pretty and bright, placing pictures and books to the best advantage, with flowers from Mrs. Carberry's hothouse, and the easy chair wheeled from the sitting-room.

"This rest will do me all the good in the

world," he said: "I shall be ten times better in a day or two."

He smiled as he spoke, and looked altogether so bright, that the sick pain in her breast was lightened. Who knew whether the two or three months might not go on to five or six—or more?—with such care as this!

At her solitary breakfast next morning, she found a letter from Lina: and opening it, felt thankful that Gerald was not in the room. Those platitudes concerning his illness, even the anticipated end of his illness—those condolences, regrets, comfortable committals of him and Marjory to higher powers,—would hardly have seemed to him so soothing as Lina had designed. They were the reverse of soothing to Marjory. She ran them speedily through; and turned the page.

"You will be interested to hear that I have found a clue to the unfortunate Jessie Bellhouse."

What was this? Marjory's breath seemed almost stopped; the blood rushed up into her face. The letter trembled in her hand, as she read.

"One day last week, the very lady in whose company I first saw that photograph,

called upon my sister. I recognized the face directly, and soon found that her remembrance of me was clearer than mine of her. Her name is Miss Stamer; she spends only a few months yearly at her Dover house, and hence it is that I have met her but once before. She reminded me of a shopping expedition on which she had escorted me, one day when I was here as a young girl, and my sister could not go out. Thus much recalled, I remembered more, and asked if on the same occasion she had been seeking lodgings for a sick servant. She replied that she had; and, to make a long story short, I obtained the address of two houses, which we had visited on that day. Yesterday I contrived to call alone at the first of these houses; and I had no sooner entered the little parlour, than the whole scene came back. Before me was the sofa, the table with the bead mats, the album itself, bound in mauve! I took it up; and surely enough —there was the bridal photograph. Opposite was the photograph of a child; a boy of about four years old, with handsome features, —the resemblance unmistakable. While I was looking at this, a young person came in, apologizing for the absence of her sister, the

mistress of the house, and asking if I wished to see the rooms. I replied that I would call again when Mrs. Jelly, the said mistress, was at home, and then inquired, as if from pure curiosity, whether the little boy were the son of the bride on the opposite page? The young woman hesitated; then finding, I conclude, from my face, that I was not a person to be mistrusted, she said: 'Yes, poor little fellow—'tis a sad case; his ma was deserted by her husband.' I asked what had become of the child; she opened the door, calling a name which I did not distinguish: and the boy himself ran into the room. I certainly never saw a finer child, quite bearing out all you have told me of his mother's beauty. He is now between five and six years old.

"Finding me interested, the young woman told me that 'his ma,' Mrs. Russell—as she called herself—died suddenly in these lodgings, leaving the baby, six weeks old, utterly friendless. She had only been here a day or two, and had informed Mrs. Jelly—who is evidently, if foolish, benevolent—that her husband had left her in France, many months before, and had never known of the child's birth; that she had written to a friend who

might be able to find him,—and that she thought, when he heard of the child, he would surely come. Mrs. Jelly therefore for some time expected him to appear; but no word, either of him or of 'Mrs. Russell's' antecedents, had ever reached her. The young woman concluded her account by remarking: 'It's just like a novel, miss, isn't it?' I replied that I feared it was often owing to foolish novels that young girls made careless marriages, ending in misery like this. Mrs. Jelly is still from home; but she is expected shortly: and when I see her, I will obtain all particulars. Meanwhile I trust to your honour to keep this strictly private. I will only add that the young woman and her sister believe the name Russell to be assumed: and that *the boy's christian name is Copelands.*

"Believe me, dear Marjory,

"Yours affectionately,

"Caroline Peele."

What would follow next? Why should the boy's name be Copelands? Marjory pressed both hands upon her heart to still the throbbing pain. A deadly fear had seized

her. Old scenes, old words, old looks, came flocking back, fitting strangely one with another: expressions of Hugh Vivian's face, tones of his voice, which she had thought to be forgotten. Oh, that Lina had either not written at all, or had put it off until the whole truth were known!

"I will not believe it—I will not," she said to herself; but that deadliness of dread did not abate. Yet could he have been allowed to fall—so deeply to fall—when all the while, every morning and every night of every year, that prayer was going up for him?

"O Almighty God, bless Mr. Hugh! and make him good."

Yes, all the while, as at quiet Rockswold she grew from childhood into girlhood, knowing only of him that he was somewhere under the eye of God. And could he have been left to himself—to the devils—like this? When she saw him at the cathedral, when she watched him praying at length for himself, could it be that so terrible a secret lay hidden in his heart? As the one relief to the anxiety which consumed her, she fell on her knees, and cried: "O God, Thou knowest!"—"Thou—Thou knowest," she re-

peated again and again. Then, yet again: "O God, if it be true, forgive him! O God, if there be any reality in prayer, if Thou art at all—forgive him!"

Too soon she had to rise, to compose herself, to go calmly, as if nothing had happened, into Gerald's room. What a contrast to the atmosphere of crime which had been suggested,—that room so pure and bright!—and Gerald, his gray eyes full of peace, lying there, waiting for Heaven.

"Marjory, are you very cold?" he asked. She caught a glimpse of herself in the glass, and saw that she was paler than ever, to her own knowledge, in all her life before.

"No, I am not cold."

"Come here," said Gerald, stretching out his hand. "Come to me."

She obeyed; and he drew her down to a seat beside his bed.

"It will all come right," he said gently, stroking her hair. "It will all come right, dear Marjory:—never mind."

She looked at him, astonished at what appeared a gift of prescience: but she saw that he knew nothing definite—he was speaking only to the trouble in her face.

"You are worried and overdone just now;

and everything seems dark: but it will pass over. Marjory, remember—and take this in:—it will all pass over."

"What shall I do when you are gone?" said Marjory in a smothered voice, resting her head upon his pillow. Almost she had opened her heart to him: but no! she would not disturb his calm brightness.

CHAPTER XIII.

"And when
I saw his soul saw,—jasper first, I said,
And second, sapphire; third, chalcedony;
The rest in order,—last, an amethyst."
Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

Lying in bed had not, as Gerald expected, made him stronger. At the end of the second day he was weaker; decidedly weaker. On the third day he was very drowsy, dozing continually. Any slight noise, or movement in the room, would awake him; he would just smile at Marjory, or gaze dreamily towards the window, and his eyes would close once more. Marjory felt very lonely as she sat beside his fire: she was glad when, towards night, he revived, and began to talk.

He told her of strange visions which had come to him in slumber—of beautiful forms and faces floating before him—of music heard as in a trance.

"Sleep is a wonderful thing," he said,—"and how soothing when one is weak!"

Two or three times throughout that night she stole into his room, and found him always peacefully sleeping, his position unaltered. At length she herself slept soundly: when she awoke, the last day of this eventful year had dawned.

Mr. Robinson called after breakfast; Gerald was once more asleep. For several minutes the doctor stood beside his bed—felt his pulse gently, without awakening him: then laid down the passive hand.

"Miss Stanhope," he said. "Could I speak to you in the other room?"

She went with him; he hesitated, paused.

"Is he worse?" said Marjory, grasping the back of a chair.

"I should advise you to send for your uncle."

"You said—you said two or three months——"

"I thought, then, that it might be so; but in these cases one cannot speak with certainty. He will not suffer.—I will send you help," he added abruptly; and hurried away from the pain he could not ease.

Marjory remained long motionless in the place where he had left her. Then, half mechanically, half in obedience to a voice in

her heart, crying "Gerald! Gerald!"—she returned to the sick chamber. This time he did not look up and ask if she were cold. She sat down beside the bed, and watched. Surely Mr. Robinson was mistaken! He looked just as usual, as he had looked for long past: only calmer, happier, more like a thin and weary child that, having cried itself to sleep, sleeps sweetly.

After a while he turned on his pillow; his eyes, unclosing, met Marjory's, and he saw in hers the expression unconsciously strong.

"Marjory, don't be anxious," he said, touching her hand. "I feel better—much better: I shall be able to get up soon."

Almost as the words were spoken, he was lost once more in that irresistible slumber.

Marjory was ere long aware of the entrance of Miss Pilkington, followed by the old woman who had assisted in the nursing some months before. She came, bundle in hand, evidently prepared to remain. Marjory said a mechanical "Good-morning," and resumed her absorbed watch. It was a relief when Miss Pilkington, behind her, breathed, in a deep whisper: "Now you—don't you worry about anything. I'll settle all that is necessary

with Mrs. Levett. Just see to your brother —and no more."

Marjory looked mutely up at her: thanks would not come in words.

"Please don't telegraph—it will startle Aunt Lucy," she said presently, as an afterthought.

"I will write instead," said Miss Pilkington; and the outer world vanished as before.

Still, through the greater part of the day, Gerald slept; waking at intervals, and taking food, then dozing off again. Often during that sleep he smiled, and exclaimed as if in joy or in wonder.

"Where could I find colours?" he said once: "Would Mr. Harding know? This is brighter than the colouring of Venice."

Another time, as if in a dream, his eyes still closed, he said:—

"If I could paint it, when I got well again, I should soon be glorious! But I never could. Just to remember it, will be more than enough."

"I wish you could tell me what you have seen," said Marjory, bending over him.

"I will some day," he murmured drowsily: and sank again into slumber.

"I will some day." Was it a prophecy?

Were days indeed in store, when in the fields of Paradise he would tell her the history of these strange hours? But oh, what might lie between—for her—between that blessed time and now? What a long waste of years! what dreary loneliness! The cherished dream of her life gone like a mirage; the faces which she had loved gone likewise—Gerald in heaven, she here. Her whole being seemed contracted into a pain as the silent hours went by.

The early twilight deepened into darkness. The stars came out, and the moon: it was a clear and frosty night. Mr. Robinson called again, but said little or nothing. Marjory was barely conscious of his presence, as he stood beside the bed. Later came Mr. Throckmorton, and remained a long time, hoping that Gerald would awake; but Gerald neither opened his eyes, nor heard when his name was spoken. The clergyman was obliged to leave him, promising to return very early next day. After this, all was quiet. Marjory persuaded the old nurse to rest in the next room; she herself unplaited her hair, and lay down in her dressing-gown, on a chair-bed at Gerald's side. The room was very still. The fire flickered, subdued yet ruddy;

the lamp was turned low. Marjory had drawn up the blind; she lay wakeful, looking at the stars.

How calmly they shone! how distant in the deep ether! Would Gerald be among them soon? Would he find out what they were? How wonderful his knowledge would be! how small earth and its concerns would seem to him! As she mused the bells rang out in the town; the old year was drawing to its close. First one peal, then another; some far away, like echoes; some silvery; some old and deep. The air was full of melody. Marjory could almost have imagined that some of it came from above, from those stars shimmering in the heights. Presently Gerald stirred, opened his eyes, and spoke.

"Marjory, is anything the matter?"

"It is only the bells ringing out the old year, dearest. Did they wake you?"

"I don't know; it does not matter. I have slept a long time. How beautiful they are!"

Both lay silent, listening. In the dim light Marjory could see his gray eyes gazing, as hers had been, towards the stars: she saw the expression of his face—thoughtful, yet full of peace.

"Marjory," he said, suddenly, "Why should we imagine that our talents end with earth? They are of the soul, not of the body. I often remember Goethe's speech: 'This life, gentlemen, is much too short for our souls.' I am thinking now of my one talent, my art. It is a part of me—I feel sure of that; it cannot die."

"So used I to argue," said Marjory, with a smothered sob.

"Yes, for earth; and why not for heaven? This craving to devise and imitate beauty, which was born with me, which has never let me rest,—it has come to nothing much here, but only God knows what work there may be for it in the future. I can't tell how, or where—I must leave all that. But it is too strong to die, Marjory."

She could not answer. She only clasped his hand, and laid her face against it; and the bells rang on.

"Patience—it is patience we want," he said dreamily: "'Though it tarry, wait for it; in the end it shall surely come—it shall not tarry.' You were puzzled about your prayers, and our Saviour's promise. It seems to me that I see it all now. That promise is not only for this world; sometimes it goes

on into the next. 'Only believe'—believe unto death! What is death? Just a portal, as I have read somewhere, joining the two lives."

"Or dividing them," broke from Marjory's sore heart.

"So it seems now to you. It will seem differently soon; you will look back to these miserable days as a dream. You have prayed for me, and I have prayed for you, Marjory. I know that you will be comforted very soon."

Marjory's tears fell thick and fast upon his hand. He felt them, and tightened the clasp.

"Don't cry, Marjory," he said gently.

"I can't help it. Oh, Gerald, how can I live in this weary world without you?"

"Think of our Saviour, dear Marjory. Think of our Saviour," he repeated in his calm tone.

As he spoke the bells ceased. All was silence. Then, one after another, all the clocks in the old city struck twelve.

"A happy New Year to you, Marjory," said Gerald, as the bells clashed out once more.

"And to you, my Gerald—to you," she

cried, rising, and clasping him in her arms.

Drifting away into an unknown future—beyond the grave. Oh, might he find a happy new year—a happy new life there! "The life that knows no ending—the tearless life."—Happy? Oh, the impotence of words!

"Lord, I see it. I see that I have been selfish, striving to keep him from Heaven. Forgive me! I will try to rejoice that he should be so blessed."

As this cry burst from Marjory's heart, the stony hardness softened. Her tears still flowed; but something of their bitterness was past. Before her eyes a door had opened; she had looked in and caught a glimpse of her Gerald's bliss.

She rested her head on his pillow, her arms still about his neck. When he spoke again, his tone was more feeble than before.

"This time last year," he said dreamily—"just about this hour, I was walking from Albion Square, and thinking about Rome. I thought that when this day came, I should perhaps be there. But Heaven is best."

"Heaven is best!" Yes, Marjory saw it. She stilled her sobs, that he might not be grieved.

He had said to her: "Think of our Saviour." Yes — that Blessed One had suffered, as she was suffering now. He also had gone down into earth's depths. The moon, yonder shining on her anguish, had shone on His. She remembered that in that hour He had prayed: "Not My Will, but Thine be done!" Not in faith alone, but in full knowledge, thus He prayed: and on His knowledge our faith may rest.

From the stormy wanderings of her wretchedness, Marjory had come at last, like a stray child returning home, to her old childish confidence.

"God knows best! Let Him manage all —for me, for Gerald, for every one, in His own way."

She lay more calmly now, though still clasping Gerald, as if her hold would stay him. The bells all clanged together in one final peal; then ceased; and their echoes died away. Gerald had relapsed into perfect stillness; she would have thought that he was again asleep,—only, when she looked at him, she still saw his eyes, open, and full of life and thought, as in the days of his health, looking fixedly out towards the stars.

She herself was sinking into a doze, when suddenly he spoke.

"Precious stones," he said, dreamily; "'All manner of precious stones. *The first jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, a chalcedony; the fourth, an emerald; the fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, a topaz; the tenth, a chrysoprasus; the eleventh, a jacinth; the twelfth, an amethyst.—And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; every several gate was of one pearl; and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass.*'"

He paused, and smiled; a calm, a heavenly smile: of perfect peace.

Then—"Thank God," she heard him say; "Thank God for my Marjory!"

As he spoke, he turned his face upon the pillow, and closed his eyes. Marjory half rose, and listened; she could not hear his breath.

A hurried call summoned the old nurse. She entered, raised the lamp; and, bringing it to the bedside, turned its rays upon the pillow.

"Whom the gods love, die young!"

This face lying here, was plainly the face of such an one; and it was dead.

"He is gone," said the nurse, gently. Marjory did not answer. Her eyes returned from the still form beside her, to the stars, striving to pierce the ether—to trace the upward track on which her Gerald's spirit was soaring.

CHAPTER XIV.

"Beating heart and burning brow, ye are very patient now,
Toll slowly.
And the children might be bold to pluck the kingcups from your mould
Ere a month had let them grow.
* * * *

"In your patience ye are strong, cold and heat ye take not wrong,
Toll slowly.
When the trumpet of the angel blows eternity's evangel,
Time will seem to you not long."
Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

But Paradise is silent, invisible; and though for a moment it seems at times to open, too soon that moment fleets, and the dividing gulf is drearier than before. When all had been set in order in Gerald's room, the blind drawn down, and the still form composed upon the bed, no longer a bed of suffering: a time of anguish unutterable came to Marjory.

"He is with Thee;—but I am alone—alone," she said to God. Her tears flowed unceasingly.

"Gerald, Gerald—I want you—I want you," her heart was crying. The speechless darkness was awful to her. She could not remember the time when Gerald had not been the chief object of her dreams, of her hopes. She could hardly realize that he was gone; that he was not.

"I don't want to be selfish,—I would not call him back; but how can I bear it?" she sobbed again and again; "I am young and healthy,—I cannot die like him; I must live on and on—perhaps for fifty, sixty years!"

So she wept and wailed into the silence. He could not be near, she thought—he must be far, far distant—or in some way he would send her some token. She remembered his kind touch upon her head, upon her shoulder; she would not be afraid, she thought, if she could feel that touch again.

Afraid? Oh, no—only glad, thankful! But there was no sign, no supernatural appearance. When she went into his room, the calm figure lay as if carved in marble; as still, as cold. The gray eyes could no more open and gaze at her; the kind young voice could no more speak to her, begging her not to cry.

There was plenty of work to be done in these sad days. Mr. Stanhope, who had arrived on the New Year's evening, was anxious to return speedily, having left his delicate wife far from well. So Marjory had to pack, and prepare for removal, all her own and Gerald's possessions. When those things had been unpacked, how happy, how full of hope, was her heart! how bright had all the world seemed, when she first entered these rooms which now she was leaving!

Arrangements were made for the funeral in that quiet spot where Gerald had desired to be laid. It so happened that Mr. Crawford was spending a few hours at Thorne; the circumstances came to his knowledge; and a day or two after his return to London, Mr. Stanhope received a kind and civil note, placing the house at his and Marjory's disposal, for so long as they could make it of service. Mr. Stanhope, however, saw no reason to accept this hospitality; he hoped immediately after the funeral to drive on with Marjory to a quiet country station, where an afternoon train stopped at a convenient hour for the journey to Rockswold.

The pretty sitting-room was dismantled at

last; the boxes were packed; the coffin-lid had been closed: all was over. The river flowed on as Marjory had so often watched it; the quiet fields stretched away on its further bank: Nature remained the same,—it was only the human lives dwelling among these scenes, which had undergone revolution. The hearse was at the door; the coffin was carried down the stairs and away. So went Gerald forth from the house which Marjory had hoped to be but, as it were, the portal of a long and prosperous life.

It was a still day, calm and cold; as they drove out into the country, the snow lay in half-thawed patches over the fields, and on the cottage-roofs. The stir of the town was soon left far behind. But Marjory could not realize that she would not drive back in the evening, and find Gerald waiting for her by the familiar fire, the table spread, the lamp lighted, as usual, the past weeks of anguish vanished as a dream.

That dreamlike feeling prolonged itself, and deepened. After a while they came within sound of a bell, distantly tolling. The slow knell came ever more clearly upon the frosty air: she knew, yet could not realize, that it tolled for Gerald. The carriage

slackened its pace; she recognized the lane: now they were passing the plantation,—the larch firs, green where all else was leafless—the spot where Jessie had stood with her basket and her trowel. Some one was riding again, as in those days long gone, through the lane. As the carriage approached, he reined in his horse, and drew to one side to let it pass. Something—she hardly knew what—in the figure, stirred Marjory with a sudden thrill: it died away again the next moment, as she remembered.

Suddenly the tolling ceased; the village bells, after an old custom in those parts, broke into a chime: as if to welcome the weary one who was coming to sleep beneath their shade. Marjory was conscious that the carriage had stopped, that her uncle was helping her out: then that, leaning on his arm, she was following the long coffin, carried reverently by rustic bearers. In the church she knew that a voice was reading; she did not hear the words which it said. Her eyes were fixed upon that silent coffin, where her life, she thought, was buried.

Soon afterwards she stood by an open grave: into which that coffin had been lowered. As the earth-clods fell heavily

upon the lid, words read long ago sounded in her ears:—

"Sleep in peace, thou blest one, within thy narrow room!
My heart I also lay beside thee in the tomb."

Three o'clock was barely past; but already, in the west, a crimson light betokened a frosty sunset. The air was very cold; but, below the churchyard wall, the brook rippled over its stones, just as it had rippled in the summer—and in that other summer, long ago, when Marjory went in quest of it. How little she had thought, then, that the same brook would ripple thus for ever past Gerald's grave! The yew-trees stood dark and sad in the still atmosphere; the other graves, closed long ago, clustered round about. A few rustic figures, scattered here and there, looked on in respectful pity: if curiosity mingled with this, it was not obtrusive.

"*That, when we shall depart this life, we may rest in Him*"—read the clergyman—"*as our hope is, this our brother doth. . . . and receive that blessing which Thy well-beloved Son shall then pronounce to all that love and fear Thee, saying, Come, ye blessed children of my Father, receive the kingdom*

prepared for you from the beginning of the world."

"Oh, that that time were come!" thought Marjory: "Oh, that it could come at once! —that I were there, with my Gerald!"

The service was ended: silence followed. She stepped forward, to look again into the grave. The last look: "the last for ever." All that story of Marjory's life was ended here: here she must leave her brother sleeping. She stood still,—her uncle waited—the crimson light grew redder in the west—the brook rippled on. Some one who, throughout the service, had been standing behind her, came gently forward, and stood at her side, over the grave. Once more that strange thrill ran through Marjory; she looked up: it seemed only a natural continuation of her dream, that she was looking into Hugh Vivian's face. The dark eyes of old met hers with an indescribable expression: which said, with more power than could be uttered in words—"I would lay down my life, if that could comfort you!" She saw it mechanically, all other things around her growing more indistinct. Gradually the strength seemed fading from her limbs, from her brain; she thought that she was sinking,

down, down, into the grave, to Gerald. In reality she had staggered, and would have fallen, but for her uncle's arm, stretched quickly forward.

* * * *

After long unconsciousness, Marjory opened her eyes. Had the years rolled back, or had they never been? Was she still, or again, a child? She lay once more in Miss Evie's little bed; the lamp was lighted; the chintz-covered arm-chair stood in its old place. On the walls shone the bright birds and flowers which had charmed her childish fancy; and beside the bed stood Bellhouse: her glance, after its first wandering survey, rested upon that kind and homely face.

"How did I come here?" she asked, still dreamily.

"Don't you think about that, or anything else, my dear," said Bellhouse, soothingly: "Here's some nice hot soup been waiting for you this hour."

She turned to the fireplace, as she spoke; a ruddy blaze was casting gleaming lights on the old furniture. Ah, this was no summer's evening! the years had been no dream. The dreary present, with its weight of grief, came back, and stared Marjory in the face.

She took silently the food provided for her; and then repeated her question.

"Your uncle and the doctor brought you here, my dear, in—the carriage. You were in a dead faint at first; and when that left you, you fell into a heavy sleep. I saw that the only thing was to get you to bed as soon as possible; and Mr. Robinson—he said it would be as much as your life was worth to take a long journey at present. Then, when your poor uncle was perplexed what to be at, your aunt being ill alone, and expecting him to-night, — Mr. Hugh said that Mr. Crawford had seen him in London, and had sent a message to beg once more that this house might in all ways be made use of, as if it was your own. As for me, Miss Stanhope, my dear, I assured your uncle that greater care could not be taken of you, if—begging his pardon, ma'am, and yours—you were a child of my own: and the end was, being indeed a case of necessity, he agreed to leave you for a day or two at the least. Mr. Robinson is to call the first thing in the morning, to see how you are. So now, ma'am, you know all about it; and I hope you will make your mind easy; for you are no more fit to travel than your poor aunt

herself: and a greater satisfaction than the nursing of you will be to me, my dear, I couldn't desire."

"You are very kind," said Marjory gently. It seemed, then, that all she had to do was to be still;—all indeed that she could do,—for her strength was utterly gone. For weeks she had been under a continual strain; the wonder was, that she had not broken down long ago! She felt weary, aching in every limb,—much as she had felt when she first lay down in this little bed, nine years and a half before. Where the tired child had lain, the tired girl, on the verge of womanhood, rested. It was not a child's heart, but a woman's, with a woman's cares, a woman's griefs, a woman's capacity for loving and for suffering,—which beat now beneath Miss Evie's coverlid.

She had been silent for more than an hour, and Bellhouse had sat down to sew, in the chintz arm-chair, when she said faintly:

"Bellhouse, where is Mr. Vivian?"

"Gone back, ma'am, to Alton. He will be at the 'Sun,' he told me, for the present."

"But when did he come from Russia?"

"Only a few days ago, my dear: so I understand. He took me altogether by sur-

prise. I had not heard a word of his being expected."

Marjory relapsed into silence, closing her eyes; and Bellhouse hoped that she was sleeping once more. But in the middle of the night, when the old nurse had risen softly from her own bed in an adjoining room to visit her patient, she found her awake—crying, crying, as if her heart would burst.

"My dear Miss Stanhope—Don't, don't you fret so, my dear: you will wear yourself out."

"Gerald—Gerald—I want Gerald," sobbed Marjory.

"He is happier where he is, my dear," said Bellhouse softly, sitting down at her side.

"I know—I know—But I want him so. There are things I want to talk over—I want to consult him, as I used. I cannot bear it."

"It is hard, my dear. Yes, I know it is hard," said the grave and gentle voice: "I know what it is—I know well."

Unconsciously, the passion of Marjory's sobs abated; some faint sense of soothing breathed upon the storm.

"Bellhouse, my way is darker than you know. I am perplexed; there is no light."

"Light will come," said Bellhouse: "Oh, my dear! I do not say it ignorantly; I am

speaking of what I have found. You trust in the Almighty, and wait; and light will come. Only wait—perhaps it won't be much longer now."

"Perhaps it won't be much longer now." The words chimed in strangely with those words of Gerald's.

"Things which you don't dream of are in store for you." It was a comfort to banish thought, and cling to that vague promise.

"Do go back to your bed, Bellhouse,—you will be so tired," she murmured, true to the unselfish instincts ever strong within her. But the old nurse would have been deeply gratified, had she known how great was the relief when she answered—

"I tired, my dear! I must be a poor creature indeed, if this would tire me!" and stayed at her post.

After a while she began softly to sing an old lullaby, familiar in years long past to the children of her charge. To Marjory it seemed like a bit of babyhood returning, with no less power to soothe than if she were a babe indeed. She lay quite silent, the tempest hushed; and presently a sweeter slumber than she had known for months stole upon her weary young brain.

CHAPTER XV.

"Mother, dear Mother! the years have been long,
Since I last hushed to your lullaby song.
Yet with strong yearning and passionate pain,
Long I to-night for your presence again.

"Over my heart in the years that are flown,
No love like mother-love ever has shone;
No other worship abides and endures
Faithful, unselfish, and patient as yours."

Florence Percy.

For many days Marjory lay passive in Miss Evie's little bed. Nature was taking its revenge, said Mr. Robinson: who forbade her to be disturbed. She would sleep for hours—wake, and lie silently watching Bellhouse's quiet movements—then sleep again. The only sign shown by her, throughout this period, of interest in the outer world, was when Bellhouse told her,—sometimes twice, always once, on each day—that Mr. Vivian had called to ask after her. Then a flush would rise to her cheek, a light would shine in her eyes: a light strangely mingled,—partly of pleasure, but partly also of pain.

As time went on, Bellhouse understood Hugh Vivian very well; but she could not understand Marjory.

The girl was sorry when she felt the strength reviving in her limbs, the life in her whole frame. "I would rather have died," she thought; but that reviving went steadily forward. At last she was able to dress, and sit in the large arm-chair.

The fire blazed cheerily, a pleasant contrast to the wintry landscape—over which an icy wind was blowing, the leafless branches waved strangely by its blast. No breath of it was suffered to touch Marjory; windows and doors fitted perfectly; all in the room was comfort. But it was hard not to remember with shrinking, that Gerald lay in the churchyard. Though only his mortal body was there, the bitter weather heightened the pain.

Marjory was very weak; she lay back in her chair, and gazed into the fire. Books and work were near; but she had forgotten them: she did not observe how time was passing. Bellhouse, after helping her to dress, had left the room; and she had since seen only Kitty—who had made for her aunt some excuse, heard without attention by

Marjory. But as the cuckoo clock in the old passage struck three, she realized, suddenly startled, that Bellhouse had been absent five hours.—The shock which all these days she had dreaded—was it at hand?

She had risen, and was vaguely listening —she knew not why—when Bellhouse herself entered. Marjory glanced at her, and sank back into the chair, her breath failing. Bellhouse's complexion, always pale, was now of an almost ashen hue; her eyes alone were red,—swollen with crying. Crushed in her hand was a letter.

"My dear Miss Stanhope, how I have neglected you! But you will forgive me, when you know all."

"You have heard from—from Dover?"

Bellhouse bowed her head, struggling for composure. Then, without a word, she laid the letter in Marjory's lap.

The caligraphy, calm and clear, was easily recognized; the writer introduced herself as a friend of Miss Marjory Stanhope: through whom, she said, her interest had first been excited by the circumstances concerning which she wrote; and to whom, but for the late bereavement, she would have committed her present painful task. The substance of

her previous letter to Marjory, was then recapitulated. Marjory passed quickly to the following page, her hand trembling as she turned the leaf.

Mrs. Jelly had at length returned home; Lina had seen her, and had learned all that she could tell of poor Jessie. The facts were here stated briefly; the story in full, as Marjory afterwards heard it from Mrs. Jelly's own lips, was as follows.—

On a moonlight night in summer, five years and a half before the present time, "Mrs. Russell," the Jessie of Thorne, had come to Mrs. Jelly's door, a baby of six weeks, or so, in her arms; and had asked for a lodging. She had offered to pay in advance; and Mrs. Jelly, a young widow, but lately embarked on her profession, had been only too glad to receive her. From the first she had been very silent, and had seemed very ill; but Mrs. Jelly "took to her" at once, because she was so pretty. "As lovely a creature as eyes could look upon," Mrs. Jelly said,—"only so pale and thin."

She engaged two rooms for a week, saying merely that she might require them longer, or she might not; it would depend on her husband.

"When she spoke of her husband, ma'am," said Mr. Jelly, "she had the air of a born princess. I could see at times that she was not out and out, as you may call it, a lady; but she might have been a queen, and her husband a king, when he was mentioned."

Two days of the week were gone when, one afternoon, "something took her all of a sudden." Mrs. Jelly, much alarmed, sent for a doctor. He came, and afterwards in private informed Mrs. Jelly that she was far gone in fatal heart-disease. She ought to be with her own friends, he said; the end might come at any time. Mrs. Jelly felt sorely perplexed, not knowing whether the young woman were aware of her condition, and fearing to alarm her.

In the evening she seemed better, and when the baby was asleep,—"as good a baby," observed Mrs. Jelly, by the way, "as eyes could wish to see,"—its mother sat up, writing letters. But at night Mrs. Jelly found her lying exhausted upon her bed; the table strewn with papers.

"I felt so faint," she said; "But my letters are finished, ready to be posted to-morrow."

Mrs. Jelly helped her to undress, and

afterwards, alarmed by her pallor, remained with her; they fell into conversation, and Jessie, her heart opened, no doubt, by the good woman's kindness, presently told something of her history. She said that she had only just crossed over from France, where she had lived for many months in great trouble,—her husband having left her seven months before the baby's birth, and never having returned. Mrs. Jelly asked if she had no friends in England, to whom she might have written? She answered, yes—she had a good mother; but hers was a runaway marriage; and she could not endure the thought of telling her mother all that had befallen her, or of the scorn and the shameful reports which might be whispered about, should she return before the baby's birth, deserted by her husband. Many, she said, had been jealous of her in her old home, and had prophesied that she would come to no good; and what would they say if she went back in such a plight? So she remained in France, supporting herself as best she could. Her husband had left her some money, and she had savings of her own; and she was clever with her fingers, and found employment at fancy shops in the neighbourhood.

"She seemed uncommon quick and handy in every way, I could tell by her talk," said Mrs. Jelly.

For many weeks she had refused to believe that her husband would not return. He was "a real gentleman, thoroughbred," she told Mrs. Jelly. The baby was born in a French hospital; and she crossed to England so soon as she was able to travel, feeling that she could no longer support herself, and that, should her last effort to find her husband fail, she must go back to her mother. This last effort she had been turning over in her mind for some time before the baby was born. There was a certain friend whom she had formerly known, and who had known her husband; circumstances led her to suppose that this friend might find a clue to his whereabouts. She had to-day written to beseech that he would exert himself in the matter; she had also written to her husband, —and if the friend could discover his address, she believed that her letter would bring him back. He had parted from her in anger, through some misunderstanding which she had here endeavoured to explain. Moreover, he had not known that there was any idea of the baby. When he heard of its

birth, she hoped, she believed, that he would surely come.

"If not," she said—"or if my friend cannot find him—I shall be driven to write to my mother."

"If you follow my advice," said Mrs. Jelly, "you'll write to your mother at once. You just send your marriage-certificate; and no one can scoff at you then."

"That was the worst," said Jessie,—she had no certificate. Her husband had taken it away, and she did not know the name of the church where she was married. It was some old church in London; she knew nothing of the locality: she had trusted all to him, reaching London, by his direction, only on the morning of their marriage. He had met her at the station, and had taken her to friends of his own: in whose house she had dressed—because, she said, she was resolved to look like a bride, since she was one! Thence they had gone straight to the church, and had been married by licence; afterwards she had been photographed, to complete her glory: and then they had started for the Continent. Here they had travelled from place to place, living luxuriously, and seeing all that was to be seen. She had

written to her mother sometimes: not often, but still sometimes: but he had always promised to post the letters, and she thought now that he had not done so; for she had received no answers. At the end of five months they quarrelled; and he left her.

After telling thus much, Jessie had seemed to ponder; and then had said that—she felt so strange, at times—it might be well, in case anything should happen, to let Mrs. Jelly know that her husband, for certain reasons, had married her under an assumed name. His real name she did not disclose. She also pointed out a small tin box, with a curious lock—which her husband, evidently by mistake, had left behind him. It contained, she said, papers of importance to him alone, with secrets which no others should know; and she begged Mrs. Jelly to promise that, in case of her sudden death, the box should not be opened until news came of him: but should be delivered, as it was, into his hands. This promise Mrs. Jelly gave readily; and took occasion to hint at the doctor's verdict.

Jessie did not seem startled: only replied that she had suffered so much—no wonder her heart was affected! that the world had

been a sad mistake for her, and she should be glad to leave it. If anything of the sort did happen before her husband came, Mrs. Jelly must write to her mother.

"You don't seem afraid at all," said Mrs. Jelly.

"No," said Jessie: "I am not afraid. If you write to mother, tell her that *her prayers have saved me.*"

Later, Mrs. Jelly had asked for her mother's address.

"I will write it down to-morrow," she replied; "Just now I am too sleepy."

In spite of their conversation, it did not occur either to Mrs. Jelly, or to Jessie herself, that for her no earthly morrow might come. But in the morning, when Mrs. Jelly, hearing the baby cry, went hurriedly to her room, only Jessie's body lay there. She must have died quite painlessly, in her sleep, the doctor said.

Among her clothes was found sufficient money to pay for decent burial; Mrs. Jelly followed her to the grave, and thenceforth nothing more was heard about her. No husband, no friend, had appeared; and, as to the mother, even her name was unknown. The clergyman of the district, a busy and

hurried man, but half believing the dead woman's story, had inserted in various papers advertisements, such as might strike the husband's eye, to satisfy Mrs. Jelly. But no result had followed: and here inquiry had ceased.

Mrs. Jelly, who then had recently lost both her husband and her newborn child, had kept the baby: whose beauty, like his mother's, attracted her. She had never repented it, she told Lina; and a better child was never seen. But now she was about to be married again, and he was growing fast; much as she loved him, it seemed hardly right, she thought, that he should burden her new husband: who was a widower, with boys of his own. Thus Lina's discoveries had been opportune; and Mrs. Jelly thankfully accepted her proposal to write to Bellhouse. The photograph was enclosed in the letter. On that last sad evening Mrs. Jelly had seen and admired it; and Jessie had said that she was welcome to keep it, as she had several more of the same. There had been little opportunity for presentations of the portrait taken in such exulting pride! It remained a tragical memorial of all that poor Jessie's folly had brought on her.

But Lina's envelope contained another enclosure: a letter which had been discovered among the papers scattered on Jessie's table. She had written two letters, she told Mrs. Jelly; but only this one could be found: and Mrs. Jelly, after a fruitless search, concluded that she had made a mistake, and that the other had been posted in the morning, when Mrs. Russell had gone out for a little while. This conclusion appeared the more probable, since the present envelope had no address beyond a name: bearing out what Jessie had said of the letter destined for her husband.

The envelope was fastened, but not sealed: Mrs. Jelly in the doctor's presence, opened it; and the contents, as both believed, decided the matter. "*My dearest husband*," the letter began, continuing with piteous entreaties that he would return, and acknowledge her and his boy before the world. It was restored to its cover, and sealed; and thus Mrs. Jelly had kept it. The nature of its contents, secondhand from Mrs. Jelly, was briefly described by Lina; but the name—the husband's name—was not mentioned. When Marjory, her heart throbbing hard and fast, had reached the well-known signa-

ture, "Caroline Peele," she looked again into the envelope for that enclosure: but it was gone. She longed to ask Bellhouse about it at once, without a moment's delay; but the words would not come.

"And Mrs. Jelly and the boy are now on their way here!"

"So it says, ma'am, as you see. I can hardly believe it: I feel like in a trance. May the Almighty for ever bless that good young lady, Miss Peele! To think of her advancing the money for the journey, and settling it, and all! Oh, ma'am, if she had not had that forecast, I could not have rested! I should have had to start off, straight away. Only for leaving you, Miss Stanhope, my dear!"

"Dear Bellhouse, I wonder you can have any thought for me at such a time. Did you find the letter waiting when you left me this morning?"

"Yes, ma'am, there it was, just as if it had been any other—on the table in the housekeeper's room. Oh, my Jessie! how often have I seen her there at play, with her toys just where that letter was lying!"

As the recollection rose before her, she broke down, and wept bitterly, hiding her face.

"Oh, Bellhouse, if I could do anything to comfort you! Oh, that I could!" cried Marjory.

Something in her tone went to the heart of the unselfish old nurse. She dried her eyes, and sat down at Marjory's side.

"Miss Stanhope, my dear, don't you vex yourself," she said tenderly; "You have plenty of sorrow of your own. Don't you fret about me; I've looked the worst in the face, these hours since the letter came: and after all, this is no new thing, in one way, for I knew my Jessie was dead: I felt as sure, as certain of it, as that I myself was alive. It's all over now—all over now; and she's safe with the Almighty."

"I am so glad Lina remembered to tell you of her saying that your prayers had saved her."

"Yes, ma'am. Oh, how I thank the Almighty for those words! Miss Stanhope, did I not say to you that no prayer is ever lost? Now—now I find the truth of it. I have prayed in the dark for years and years; and many's the time my heart has failed me. But she said my prayers had saved her! Oh, when I've just got over the first shock, those words will be like summer sunshine

in my heart, ma'am, till the end of my life."

The tears were flowing again, but gently. After a while, Bellhouse's face being turned aside, Marjory got courage to ask the question which had trembled on her lips—

"Bellhouse—have you got the letter which was found on Jessie's table?"

There was a long pause.

"Ah! that's another trouble, ma'am—a sore trouble. I hope though, Miss Stanhope, my dear, it will make no difference to you, except so far as you're sorry for other people. That letter, ma'am, was addressed to Mr. Hugh."

Marjory grew only a little whiter, as she sat, her blue eyes fixed on Bellhouse.

"I could not have believed it, only there was my Jessie's writing. It gave me a turn, as if something had risen out of a grave, to see that writing again. It was all weak and scrawled, but plain enough,—'Hugh Vivian, Esq.'"

"Did you open the note?"

"No, ma'am. I sent it straight away; straight, as it was, by the gardener's boy, to him that it was meant for."

"To Alton?"

"I did, ma'am; and I'm thinking that he will be here directly. That is, he will be here unless—But no! I mustn't doubt it."

"Bellhouse, do you think it can be true—that he really married Jessie?"

"I don't know what to think, ma'am. That is the long and the short. I don't know what to think."

She had dried her tears, and sat looking into the fire, pale and subdued, but thoughtful; calmly considering the matter, as only one long accustomed to school her own impulses, and to act justly by all men, could, under such circumstances, consider. She went on, reasoning to herself.

"There's a deal that seems against him. The little darling called 'Copelands,' and all. If it was any one I did not know, I should believe it for certain. But Mr. Hugh—as I've known from a babe! He was spoiled from the first, and a bit wild! and I fear me he had little thought of serving the Almighty. But he was as kind as he could be, always, to all things. I never remember him selfish, not where it pained other people. He might have run off with my Jessie, and he might have married her." Marjory winced, but uttered no sound. "There was that wild-

ness in him, and that passionateness, I feel he might have done that: but leave her in such a way—think of her no more—and then come and settle close to me, and tell me so kind that he was sorry about it, as he's done more than once. Oh, ma'am!" cried Bellhouse, suddenly, as facts thronged upon her, "it's more than I can bear to believe! It would be wickedness past fathoming."

"Yes," said Marjory; "there is no doubt of that. If he has done this he must be utterly wicked."

"I feel almost wicked myself, ma'am, for thinking it possible. And yet—oh, my dear, I remember, in bygone times—I was getting very anxious about Mr. Hugh and her. And it was partly through my dear lady suspecting he had a fancy for her, that she sent her away. Then Bullingham, that he went to, is but eight miles from Ripley; and when my Jessie disappeared, I remember, Mr. Hugh was gone too,—we never knew where. My dear lady often said how grieved she felt that he had never written. No one heard anything about him for a long, long while: there's no denying that. Oh, Miss Stanhope, my dear, my mind misgives me! Somehow it does seem to fit in altogether."

It did, indeed. Too plainly Marjory saw it. She could have added, if she would, to Bellhouse's sad list. She could have told of the manner, the expression, which had fixed Lina's suspicions, which had vaguely troubled herself, when Jessie's name was mentioned in his presence. And yet, in a tenfold sense, she "could not bear" to believe that he was guilty.

There was long silence, meditative on Bellhouse's part, while Marjory struggled for self-control. Her voice must not tremble, her face must not show the agony in her heart.

"I have thought it my duty, ma'am, if you will excuse the liberty, to say all this to you. There's no doubt but that one who was bad enough to act in such a way would think nothing of denying it: and so it will be your duty, my dear, as far as you can, to make up your own mind. Because, excuse me, ma'am, it is plain that, whatever may have been in the past, his whole mind is fixed now upon you; and every day lately he has asked how soon he will be able to see you. So you must look it all well in the face, Miss Stanhope, my dear, and pray to the Almighty to guide you. Oh, my dear, for-

give me—you have no mother; and my poor Jessie and her bitter sufferings rise up before me for a warning. Even if he don't deny, if he confesses all—you couldn't ever be happy, married to one who would act so. I must forgive him, if it's he, because the Almighty commands it; but oh, ma'am, it will be like hell torment to look upon his face!"

"Bellhouse, you need not say any more. Don't be afraid. Not his face only, but his very name, will be that to me, if what we fear is true!"

At this moment there was a knock at the door. Kitty looked in.

"Aunt," she said, "Mr. Vivian wants to see you this minute. I don't know what's the matter; but his horse is all of a steam."

CHAPTER XVI.

"This is no my ain life,
And I peak and pine away,
Wi' the thochts o' hame, and the young flow'rs
I' the glad green month o' May.
* * * *

"There's nae place like our ain hame;
Oh, I wish that I was there!—
There's nae hame like our ain hame
To be met wi' ony where!—
And, eh! that I were back again
To our farm and fields so green;
And heard the tongues o' my ain folk,
And was what I hae been!"

From "Mansie Wauch's Autobiography."—*Blackwood's Magazine*, 1826.

"Oh, how could I wish to keep Gerald in such a world?" cried Marjory. She was standing alone in the window, looking out over the slopes of snow; too restless, too sorely racked by suspense, to sit still any longer. She pressed her forehead against the pane; her heart was beating violently.

"Lord God—remember how I have prayed! Remember Thy Promises!" she murmured,

straining her eyes towards the leaden sky. The keen wind, sweeping through the trees, seemed typical of those painful influences by which human souls are whirled along, to wretchedness here and hereafter. On they go,—away, away, fleet the souls—and with them, who can tell how vast a number of hopes, of loves, of—of prayers? do the prayers perish like the rest?

An hour had passed, it might have been a day, for all Marjory's observance of time; when Kitty entered with lights, and with a message from her aunt to beg that Miss Stanhope would go to bed. Aunt was very sorry that she could not come herself; she would come presently.

"Where is she?" inquired Marjory.

"She has been with Mr. Vivian, miss, till just this moment; and now Mr. Vivian is writing in the housekeeper's room, and aunt is gone upstairs."

There was nothing to be learned from this! nothing remained but to wait. Marjory was thankful to creep under the clothes, and hide herself from the world. If bad news came ere long, she could bear them better so. Thus when Kitty, somewhat later, reappeared, carrying a tea-tray, she found Marjory

safely settled in the little chintz bed, her fair hair flowing over the pillows.

"I can't say as you look none the better for being up, miss," remarked Kitty: "The gentleman did send up these; but may be, as you seem so tired, I'd best lay 'em on the mantelpiece till to-morrow."

"What are they?" cried Marjory, instantly all alive. Then she saw a small packet on the tray; and a note, addressed to herself. She took quick possession of them, holding them fast, while Kitty arranged her little tea-table.

"Did Mr. Vivian ask for an answer to this note?"

"No, thank you, miss; he said nothing, only would I take it to you? I suppose it's what he was a writing,—for he's finished now, and gone. At least he's walking about in the park, in all the wind and cold," said Kitty, eyeing Marjory. Perhaps she had her own private suspicions on the matter. Marjory smiled and nodded cheerfully, to disarm them.

"That will do, Kitty, thank you. Tell your aunt not to hurry herself; I am quite comfortable."

She felt weak and worn no longer; life

and excitement had revived. As the door closed, and she found herself alone, she hastily opened the packet. Within was a small manuscript book, with a dark leather cover. The note would explain it: she opened that also, and read:

"Forgive my troubling you at such a time, with my own affairs: I cannot help it. I see from Miss Peele's letter, that you have heard this horrible charge against me; you have long known, she says, of her suspicions. I have been wondering what right or reason she could have—before these last events—to form any such suspicions at all. It strikes me that at times, I may have shown by my manner, that Jessie Bellhouse's name was painful to me. It has been painful to me for years; but as to the cause, I ask you, before you judge, to read this old journal of mine; it will explain things better than I can. I may be a coward—but there were times in my past life, which I cannot well bear to speak of;—the shame, I may say the agony, which they still raise in me, I cannot express in words. No wonder if my face has shown it,—or something of it!

"I have told Bellhouse a part of what you will read—a part only, for her daughter's

sake, no less than for my own. I confess to you that, years ago, when I was a foolish boy, I thought I had a fancy for Jessie. It never came to more than a fancy—excited solely by her beauty. In those days I imagined that she was smitten with me: I now believe that she was smitten with my position, and had at times a dream that I might marry her, and make her 'a lady.' When I sank into a penniless bank-clerk, I was nothing any more in her eyes: as you will see.

"As to this crime laid to my charge, I am ready to swear to you by all that is sacred on earth or in heaven, that I am utterly innocent. I never even knew of Jessie's disappearance, until nearly two years after it took place. There is some inexplicable mess—which I hope to unravel in time. Meanwhile, I only ask you to believe in me: and when I speak of Heaven, let me say that Heaven is no longer an empty name to me. When I can see you, I shall have much to tell you, if you will listen.

"Hugh Vivian."

Again and yet again, Marjory read the hurried note: of which the handwriting bore evident trace of the agitation wherein it was

penned. Then, by an irresistible impulse, she raised it to her lips.

"He is innocent! He is innocent!" she repeated to herself. "Yes, if the whole world doubted him, I would believe in him. I do not understand it: but he is innocent."

The strength had come back to her countenance, to her heart; her blue eyes shone with a light which they had not known since the days when she had yet hope for Gerald. Still holding fast the precious note, she turned to the journal.

* * * *

The first entry bore a date in the second summer after that of Marjory's childish adventures at Thorne: when Mr. Vivian, the father, had been dead almost a year, and Hugh and his mother were living together at Bullingham. He must have been about two-and-twenty when this volume was begun, and Marjory a little girl just entered on her teens—living a free and happy life at quiet Rockswold, planning her plans for Gerald, and never dreaming of the deep waters overwhelming the bright young soldier who had played so prominent a part in the fairy world of Thorne.

The Journal.

"June 20th, 18—.—My mother ill all day. I never saw her anything like it before. A sultry, gasping kind of day. She kept talking about the Copeland woods; she seemed hardly herself at times.

"June 28th.—I heard a sermon to-day on the power of prayer,—I wonder how much of it is true. At any rate one can but try: I will try it for my mother.

"June 29th.—I am not a good hand at prayers. I don't know that I ever said any before, except the one my mother taught me for night and morning, when I was a little chap—and at church, out of the Prayer-book. I make a poor business of it when I have to find words out of my own head; but according to the parson, that don't matter. At least I am trying my best—for my mother's sake. Will anything come of it, I wonder?

"July 4th.—Night after night I kneel at my window, praying or trying to pray,—I am more practised in it now. I begin to hope it may be answered; if there is any truth in any of it, there must be pity for my mother. I thought she seemed better yesterday; but to-day she is as bad as ever.

"July 7th.—That old Browning is a fool,—half quack and half old woman. Clearly he doesn't understand my mother's case. I shall quarrel with him some day—that's a certainty. Broiling hot: these rooms are stuffy past conception. If I had my old chestnut, wouldn't I make up for all this time I've been longing for a canter! We would soon be out of sight of Bullingham,—then I'd slacken my rein, and feast my eyes on the green fields and lanes. Prime weather for eels! I'd lay a wager that those Jackson fellows are setting eel-traps this moment, now I'm not there to catch them! These must be fine days for all rascals round about Copelands.

"July 12th.—My mother had a paroxysm of downright agony this evening. Sent for old Browning, and made him tell me the truth. He suspects some inward formation, but cannot speak with certainty. If I could but take her to London, to consult H——! There is no hope for her here.

"1 A.M.—Just left her room,—she has fallen asleep at last. I sat by her bed three hours, fanning her, and reading to her when she could listen. Is it cruel to wish to keep her in such a world? Yet when she blessed me to-night, and fell asleep with her cheek

against my hand, I felt that life would be hell to me without my mother.

"July 16th.—Heard to-day the wonderful news that my godmother, old Lady Waters, has left me £100. Now I can save my mother. She shall go to London, have the best advice,—then to the sea. I wonder when I shall get it?

"July 17th.—I begin to believe in prayer; this legacy was quite unexpected,—I have tried to thank God. I am burning with impatience to get the money. It is left free of legacy duty; that was thoughtful of the old girl. My mother a little better to-day—if it comes soon, I shall save her.

"July 18th.—Miss Bulkley called. My mother thinks her patronising, but that is only a diseased fancy,—I wish she would not give way to it. It would do her so much good to go to Ripley for a month, as Miss Bulkley proposes,—but she fancies it an act of charity on Miss Bulkley's part, and will not hear of it. Never mind! there's a good time coming! it will be jolly at the sea, alone with my mother, when I get the £100. Jessie was on the box; she looked as bewitching as ever. I felt weak about her, as usual; but I doubt whether she's over-gifted with heart.

She did not look at all distressed, though she heard me tell Miss Bulkley about my mother.

July 21st.—Peele's airs drive me downright mad. In our county he'd have been as proud as twenty peacocks, if—which is not likely—he could have scraped an acquaintance with my father. Here he lords it over us, treats me barely as a gentleman, and as to my mother!—'He is sorry my mother has never been able to see Mrs. Peele,—Mrs. Peele would have been happy to give her one or two good introductions.'—Introductions, forsooth!

"I had some idea of the pettiness of these second-rate townspeople; but nothing near the truth. The women at least, seem to live for tittle-tattle; my mother and I are prime game. Richard Peele has now and then the impudence to repeat some of their speeches. I gather that my mother is thought 'stuck-up,' because she chooses not to leave her own station; and for our poverty—the refined condescension on that score is grand to behold! 'Such is Life.' A few of the Bulkleys' friends have called upon us; but it goes no further. My mother has neither health nor money for society now—even if she had heart. But when I look back a year or two—Well! it gives one a lesson on 'the

world.' I shall be a first-rate philosopher in time, if this kind of thing goes on.

"July 31st.—My mother very bad again, pining for sea air. When will this legacy come?

"August 3rd.—That mean little sneak, Lord Waters, is disputing his mother's will. There is to be a law-suit; and no legacies can be paid till judgment is given. A delusion, after all! I have not had the heart to tell my mother.

"Aug. 4th.—Last night I went off alone, out of the town, to work off my madness. I did feel mad,—I should have killed that Waters, if I had met him! I found a quiet little place, beyond the houses; there was a rick of new hay,—I lay down under it. The stars were shining—the sky looked still and kind. I thought of what that parson had said about trials of one's faith; I prayed again. Oh, if there be a God, He will hear me! I prayed to Him, with all my heart, to save my mother. If the law-suit be settled quickly, it may yet be in time. To-day I told her the horrible news. She tried to cheer me, said she felt a little better. I never knew before, what she is to me.

"Aug. 12th.—Cooler—a fine day for the grouse. Old Brush looks so desponding, one

would almost fancy he remembered our jolly party on that blue moor near Aberdeen, this day twelvemonth. That was in my last week of happiness: four days after came the telegram. Well! whining will bring nothing back. 'It's all over, old Brush,' I say, as he sidles up to me. He seems to understand, and shuffles away under the sofa, as if he were in disgrace.

"I found out a queer secret last night. I don't know whether I ought to keep it secret —may be not, but then—I only half trust my own motives. That little coquette, Jessie, seems to be privately engaged to some one unknown—a gentleman, she says; and she knows a gentleman as well as anybody. The fellow certainly looked one, at a distance. He looked like—confound it, what am I coming to, breaking out in such dirty suspicions? I had been a good walk across the fields, and found myself within two miles of Ripley,—turned in a hurry, afraid my mother might be anxious, and took French leave with a short cut through the plantations. The path was winding, and a gap in the trees revealed, some way on, Jessie and this same unknown 'gentleman,' who was in the act of kissing her hand. She stood half a foot from him,

the hand extended, after the manner of royalty. This ceremony performed, he turned, and disappeared in no time. I don't know why I should have felt so mad,—I am a precious fool! She came on, smiling to herself, her head held high, and that rose-bloom I know of old, like paint upon her cheeks. I took her by surprise, confronting her suddenly; but she was not in the least confused: and when I taxed her with what I had seen—"He is my *fiancé*," replies her Royal Highness, as cool as a—what shall I say? cucumbers would be torrid to it! However, she presently so far lowered her dignity as to request me not to mention what I had seen; and, while I parried this point, other facts came out. His name she would not reveal; but he was 'a captain in the army,' of good family; their acquaintance was of some months' standing—they met at Alton, in the spring, when she was at Thorne with Miss Bulkley. He was passing through Alton on business, saw her in a shop, followed up the acquaintance, and traced her here. They would be married so soon as he saw his way to it without displeasing his friends; till then they must wait in secrecy,—she had not even told her mother. But I would make

no promises, and came away, leaving the Lady Jessie in high dudgeon.

"The fact is, I want time to think. Is it fair to keep old Bellhouse in darkness? and, then, who is this fellow? To be sure, I know no girl more cool-headed, or better able to take care of herself, than Jessie: so why should I meddle? I am half afraid of being a sneak unawares. That little minx thought something of me, once, when I was at Copelands: but what is a poor bank clerk, beside this mighty 'Captain?' Well!—I must let the question be for the present. It shall lie in my mind, and digest.

"Aug. 15th.—A note from Jessie, in a fine, pointed hand, demanding a written promise that I will not mention her engagement until such time as the 'Captain' gives leave. I have answered in three lines, that I would promise to say nothing without warning her—but no more. The little ungrateful being observes that, if the facts were discovered, her mother would get her back to stupid old Thorne, to die of the dumps. Stupid old Thorne, indeed! Oh, to wake, and find it all a dream, and myself riding up to the door of that same Thorne—the old house basking in the sunshine, and the dear old lady coming

in her mushroom hat across the park. . . . But here we are in stuffy Bullingham, and here am I a clerk in a shabby coat,—and, if I don't take care, I shall slouch like any desk-slave of them all—so I'll be off, and post my note.

"August 18th.—Sultry; and my mother droops. I fear she is very lonely when I am at the bank: and she is too weak to wait upon herself, and misses her maid terribly. To think of my mother, always used to first-rate servants, left now in her illness quite alone, except for my clumsy offices! She is worse,—I cannot deny it: and no wonder! Heat even at Copeland was terrible to her, and here are no alleviations. She cannot walk—or bear the rattle of the Bullingham flys: she lies all day near the window, but no fresh air seems to reach her. The streets are baked through and through; the opposite houses send back a volley of stuffiness. I can go out and escape; but there is no escape for her.

"August 21st.—Browning has spoken more of his mind than ever before. He says, as I suspected, that H—— is my mother's one chance—that he can save her if any one can, and, so far, it is possible. But the disease

is making such rapid strides, that every day is of importance. If that confounded legacy would come! she might have to stay some time in London,—she would need every comfort; and we have only just enough to live upon, as it is. Lady Thorne is ill, and cannot attend to business, or I would ask her to advance the £100. I have not given up praying,—I cannot help hoping that God will hear me yet.

"August 23rd.—Up all night with my mother. Her agony was terrible. Oh, how it maddens me to remember the money I have squandered! If I had but foreseen this, I could have laid plenty by. Yet God foresaw it. Why did He send no sign?

"August 24th.—My mother will die. I cannot bear it. No relief—no help—It is unutterable.

"August 27th.—I have done a dreadful thing. But I was driven to it. God knows I was driven to it. Yet I have lost my honour—my self respect,—I am no longer what I was. Oh, if I had some friend to talk it over with!—but I have none. I must write instead — that will be some relief. I can burn it afterwards, if I choose: or keep it as a warning.

"It was this morning—I was alone in the bank,—we have seldom much business on a Thursday. Phillips, the senior clerk, was out—the other ill at home—old Peele closeted in the private room, with some important person. It was twelve o'clock; the sky was blue and hot; I was thinking of my mother and the sea. Again she had been ill all night, —I had left her quite broken down—tears rolling down her cheeks from mere weakness, —my stately, queenlike mother! I built a castle in the air, to soothe myself, of the legacy, of H——, his cure—and then a new life. The swinging of the door startled me; old Bulkley came in, looking just as he used to look at Thorne—so large, portly, kind. 'Well, Vivian,' he said; 'How are you? How's your mother? I've not a minute—an appointment at home in half-an-hour. Only want to get rid of these—Just enter them, there's a good fellow!' Then, waving his glove in his old way, he was gone before I could open the packet left in my hand. It was a roll of notes—£200 in amount. How can I write this? Yet I will—the pain will help me. For I may be tempted again,—and if I were once such a weak, mean wretch, who can tell what I might be a second time?

I don't know what came over me,—a voice in my ears said, 'It will be only for a little while.' Yes, I felt sure, at that moment, of the legacy—that in a month or so, I could pay back the money. I knew Mr. Bulkley's careless ways, and that he would never find out. All in a moment, somehow, I had paid half the notes into the till, and the other half were in my own pocket,—then I entered in the books £100 to Mr. Bulkley's account. Just as I wrote the figures, the private door opened, Mr. Peele showed out his visitor; and at the same moment Phillips came back—I was alone no longer, and the deed was done.

"Well, I should fancy hell—if there be a hell—must be something like what I felt in the next few hours, when I remembered the money in my pocket—and that I had stolen it. I say *when;* but in reality the thought was never out of my head; till I wondered if it would drive me mad. I knew that I was a thief. I could hardly stand it: yet I said to myself that it was for my mother's sake, and that I would pay back every farthing. When I went home to luncheon, my mother was free from pain, but exhausted—lying as usual close to the window, the door

open,—panting for air. I said, 'O Mother, If I could but get you to the sea!' She answered faintly, smiling, — 'That would soon cure me!' I would have given my life at that instant, if so I could have got her there. But honour is dearer than life. I thought—'Yes, I have sacrificed more than life, for her.' But the thought gave no relief. Then I remembered what I used to be—Yes, I thought myself a gentleman, once—more of one than most. How proud I felt at that review in Hyde Park, when the Queen herself asked who was that noble-looking young officer! But all that is over now. I noble? Oh, many a one whom I have thought below me, would scorn to be what I was to-day! To call it borrowing was merely a farce—I must give it its true colours, I was a thief. How could I look any fellow of our regiment in the face, with that consciousness upon me? I who prided myself upon my honour! Now I can understand the temptations of the poor wretches who pick pockets in the streets; I have been next door to them! I have done all I can to retrieve it; but that fact can never be retrieved.

"When I had been back in the bank about an hour, I felt I could bear it no longer.

The notes were still in my pocket,—I resolved to put them in the till with the rest, and there would be an end of it: an end, if I could but alter the entry in the book. I was alone again for a minute; I found the place in a desperate hurry; but, like a fool, my hand shook, so that I made a great blot: I mopped it up with blotting-paper, and stupidly dried the strokes which changed the 1 into 2. There they were, faint and blue, quite different from the bold 1 which I had made in the morning—which stood out, black and uncompromising, witnessing against me. I took the pen to blacken the rest again, but before I could do it, the door opened once more, old Peele came in, and my chance was over. He saw my confusion, looked hard at me, and came behind my shoulder. 'Is that figure a 1 or a 2, Mr. Vivian?' said he stiffly. It struck me that he might choose to corroborate my answer by forthwith counting the money in the till; and the extra notes were still in my pocket. I answered, 'One.' He looked again hard at me, and observed, 'You will do well to be more careful; if I mistake not, you wrote 2 at first.' There he was out; but I said nothing. For the rest of the day

he watched me closely, and I had no chance to act further in the matter.

* * * *

"I had to stop here; and now it is late. But I will write the whole horrible story. I wish to suffer—I wish to brand it in upon my mind. I was almost in despair at first, when old Peele cut off my repentance; but presently a new thought occurred to me. After dinner, for which I forced myself to stay, that my mother might not be anxious, I started at once to Ripley. It is eight miles; but the walk seemed nothing. I reached the house about nine, and was shown into Mr. Bulkley's study. On the way I met Jessie, going towards the staircase; she looked at me curiously, and seemed about to speak, but this the servant's presence, I suppose, prevented. As for me, I saw her without seeing, and should not remember it only for what happened later. In a few minutes Mr. Bulkley came to me. I don't think, that if I studied the matter for years, I could find words to express his kindness; it was simply inexpressible. I gave him the £100, told him the whole truth, told him also that he could prosecute me if he liked, or expose me in any way: only I should be thankful

if he would wait until my mother was better. It was some time before he spoke, and I went through tortures, till I ventured to look at him, and saw that he was struggling to command his voice: he was sorry, not angry, it turned out. There's no need to write what he said: no fear of my ever forgetting it! Oh, if God refuses to bless me and my poor mother, at least He will bless him! He must. Not only did he freely forgive me, refuse even to say a word in exposure; but he actually prayed and entreated me to keep the money. Of course I declined, —it would have choked me; and my mother, who must never know the facts, would not have consented to use it. His forgiveness alone was enough,—far more than enough— to overwhelm me utterly. I did not tell him all, or half, our distress, or the force of my temptation; I could not bear to snivel, or beg. But he saw how terribly cut up and ashamed I was—and perhaps he guessed at what I could not say,—I hope so. Fine, noble, princely, old fellow; I would lay down my life for him, if that could do him service.

"Well, I had left him, with my heart full, and was starting on my way home, when

some one called my old name — 'Mr. Hugh' — and there was Jessie, running after me. I stopped till she caught me up, all out of breath and heated: I never knew that any girl, least of all she, could look so vindictive!—'I got your letter, Mr. Hugh,' she panted, as soon as she could speak: 'You would make no promises, you said. But now, I fancy, you'll change your mind; it shall be tit for tat.' I asked what she meant. 'I mean that I know all about you, —all you have done; I heard all that you and Mr. Bulkley said:—I was listening at the door.' 'Listening at the door, you mean little wretch!' I cried. 'Who are you to talk of meanness?' said she: 'I listened because I thought you had come to tell of me, and I wanted to defend myself; but now you are as much in my power, as I am in yours.' She laughed as she spoke. It seemed a horrible dream. I should not have known her for Jessie—the Jessie I fancied myself smitten with, at Thorne. Talk of the worldliness of towns! no town can surpass the worldliness ingrain in those country girls, who look so smiling and so simple! If I were still Hugh Vivian of Copeland, she would never speak so to me. I was thunder-

struck, answering nothing; she went on more quietly. 'I don't want to be hard on you, Mr. Hugh;—I shouldn't have said a word—only the thought of being sent back to that dull old Thorne, and my engagement broken off, drives me to it. This is all your own fault, for not promising what I asked.' Still I did not speak: it was all I could do to keep back language which afterwards I should have repented. 'If you knew what it is to me,' she proceeded, 'to think that I am to be a lady, to take my proper place in the world,—the place a pretty woman ought to have;—not to be obliged to work and knock under, and feel I am a servant, any more,—to have plenty of money, and do justice to my taste in dress—not to mention all the multitude of other things:—you'd understand better.' 'Your fine Captain would hardly feel flattered if he could hear you, Jessie,' said I. 'That is nothing to the point, Mr. Hugh,' said she, with her old toss of the head: 'The Captain is handsome and grand enough for any lady to feel proud of him, and I shall feel proud to become his wife. That's enough to satisfy any man. And now all I want is to make a bargain, you give me the promise I asked: and in

return I'll give you one—never to mention what I heard. But if you refuse to promise, mark my words! the truth shall be told. Every one about Copelands and Thorne—and elsewhere, for what I care—shall know that you robbed Mr. Bulkley; and that only his pity and charity saved you from jail.' 'JESSIE!' I felt myself thunder: then out came the oaths which I had struggled to keep in before. I could not help it,—I don't know what I said,—nothing fit to be said to any woman. Yet—oh, what a fiend in human form Jessie seemed then to me! Oh, to be under her power—dependent on her mercy! Oh, what a maddening thought still! It was all I could do not to lay hands on her,—I wonder how I managed it! it was from nothing in the world but the thought that I was a man, and she a girl. If she had but been a man like myself! The past rushed back upon me,—my lost place in the world, in life, in honour. And she—a servant—a child of servants,—low in birth, and in nature. Well, it won't bear dwelling on! But I can understand now, how some men murder some women. Oh, there is power of stinging in a woman! I never half knew it before. For a minute I felt inclined

to give her leave to say her worst: anything seemed preferable to being under an obligation to her. But then I remembered my mother; the blow would kill her,—our means of support too would be gone, for old Peele would have no mercy on such disgrace. Well, that's enough: the long and the short was, that I had to stoop to promise what she required,—never to mention one word of my discoveries respecting her and this precious 'Captain,' until she herself chose to publish the engagement. On this condition alone she promised equal secresy on her side; and so we parted.

"I am degraded—lower than words can say. I cannot but feel myself more or less at that creature's mercy; for she would be as likely as not, if it suited her, to break her promise. Or if not that, can either she or I ever forget what passed to-night? I suppose I shall grow used to the burden of it in time: just now, it seems almost unbearable. Oh, what would my mother feel, if she had any idea, either of what I had this day sunk to do and be, or of the thread my good name hangs on! And to think that I once madly admired that girl, and thought her worth fifty of any in my own station! Now I hate

her, and despise her,—even her face is detestable to me; and if ever there were a lie on earth, that face is one.—I will go to bed, and try to shut its mocking smile out of my mind.

"August 28th.—There has been a new chapter to the story—one that I never dreamed of. When I went to the bank this morning, I thought old Peele looked rather queer; but I was too sick at heart to take much notice of him. Towards eleven o'clock I was summoned to his private room: I went;—there, looking kind and concerned, stood Mr. Bulkley, and, open before old Peele, was the book with my unfortunate blotted entry. I wondered for a moment whether Mr. Bulkley had betrayed me, after all; but no,—Mr. Peele spoke in his measured tones, and said that he had felt it his duty to request Mr. Bulkley's personal attendance in investigating a certain matter. The fact was, the rigid old party had observed my confusion yesterday, turned it over afterwards in his mind, and later, examining the entry, and comparing it with my former figures, concluded that something was wrong. He talked for some time, in most correct language; but this, so far as I made out, was the pith: fol-

lowed by a direct inquiry of Mr. Bulkley as to the exact sum paid by him into my hands. Mr. Bulkley, that fine old English gentleman, who never in his life told a lie, I am very sure,—hummed and hawed for a second: during which I saw, by Mr. Peele's face, that his suspicions were more than confirmed:—and then began to say something about 'all right'—but I stopped him by making a clean breast of it, and telling Mr. Peele the whole truth. I felt desperate, as if I hardly cared whether or no I were exposed before the whole town: till suddenly I remembered my mother; that thought kept me from defying him, in words at least. Then went on a discussion, stormy at times, between him and Mr. Bulkley. I listened as if it concerned any one else; my brain seemed numbed, somehow. Mr. Peele wanted to dismiss and disgrace me; he almost urged Mr. Bulkley to prosecute. As to the dismissal, if Mr. Bulkley were not so important a shareholder—by far the largest in the bank, fortunately for me—I could see that Mr. Peele would not have listened to him for one moment. As it was, he heard against the grain, and soon the truth came out—the truth I have long suspected. He said that he had disliked from

the first, my admission into the bank; that young men of antecedents such as mine, were invariably idle and dissipated, that, knowing this, he had always mistrusted me, and feared the worst; and, though I could not be accused of any neglect of business, he could see that application was a struggle to me, only maintained by a sense of its pressing necessity. Here Mr. Bulkley broke in, and said—'Well now, Peele, I should have thought that a feather in his cap! if the boy does his best in spite of difficulties, why reproach him?' I was very near making a fool of myself at those kind words; and to break down before old Peele would have been too terrible! It was a relief when he froze me up again, with his rigid voice: ordering me out of the room while he and Mr. Bulkley discussed the matter. I wonder how high a fellow's blood can boil without anything coming of it? I never knew, in Copeland days, what it was possible to go through. Only for my mother, I would not one instant have remained dependent on that fellow. But there would be nothing, to buy her bread even, if I were out of work.

"It was almost an hour before they sent for me again. Then I found that old Peele had been forced to yield: and that Mr. Bulk-

ley had not only induced him to keep me on in the bank, but had drawn from him a promise not to disgrace me by publishing my offence. 'Indeed,' says Peele, 'I have no need to promise that: the credit of the bank is too precious to me.' It was a bitter pill to him to keep me, I could see,—and no wonder, perhaps: he cannot see into my mind, or know how sorely I repent. He loaded me with warnings and exhortations, finally saying that, such faint trust as he had in me, being now entirely gone, his vigilance over me henceforth would be incessant and minute: therefore, for my own sake, I should do well to avoid any further transgression. 'You mustn't be too hard upon him, Peele,' said old Bulkley: 'The poor boy has had many trials.' I tried to thank Mr. Bulkley, but I made a sad mess of it; I wished I could have knelt down, and kissed his great kind hand. Mr. Peele, too, I had to thank; that was easier. I said to him—'Mr. Peele, if it were not for my mother, nothing should induce me to annoy you by my presence in the bank. But I give you my word of honour that you shall never have cause to doubt me in any way again.' When I spoke of my honour, he smiled:—so low have I sunk!

"Aug. 29th.—If my mother were not here, I would not trouble, but go comfortably on to the dogs. It would be a jollier life than my present one. No news of the legacy, and my character gone—at best, kept only by suffrance of old Peele and Jessie.—Yes, I would soon be off! and give myself full swing."

CHAPTER XVII

"With fiercer heat than flamed above my head
My heart was hot within me; till at last
My brain was lightened when my tongue had said—
Christ is not risen!
Christ is not risen, no—
He lies and moulders low;
Christ is not risen."

Arthur H. Clough.

Journal continued.

"SEPT. 3RD.—I am keeping straight only by iron efforts. Continually an impulse comes on me to get dead drunk, and forget my own existence; or to throw up my post, and enlist; or to break out in some other way, and astonish all the solemn faces which look at me as if I were the most inky-hued of sheep. I feel half mad at times; I think it is indeed a kind of madness,—but one look at my mother, or one thought of her, quiets me in a moment. She is certainly thinner; and that flush, so unnatural to her lily-like complexion, comes every day. I watch the post and the papers, with anxiety which half

sickens me:—but no news. Surely the inventors of our law were made of iron! the delays are endless. I still pray constantly to God; and the sermons tell us that God appears to discourage us sometimes, when He is merely waiting for the right moment. If this be true, He may have help in store for us, and I may yet see my mother well and strong, and begin perhaps a new life in a new place, the troubles here forgotten.

"Sept. 11th.—Mr. Peele's bad opinion of me seems invincible. I try to be attentive and industrious,—a model of angelic submission I feel myself, sometimes!—but nothing makes any impression upon that adamantine prejudice. The whole town bows down before the Peele family; they are standards of excellence. They are considered also great aristocrats, and their society is courted by all the tuft-hunters of Bullingham. Wherefore, I know not: for the other day, from a chance allusion, I discovered that they themselves regard 'county families' as stars of superior magnitude—and feel honoured by the possession of 'a bowing acquaintance' with one or two. Yet they evidently look down upon my mother and me, on account of our small way of living. My mother, the

queen of her own county! But what rot it all is, after all!

"Sept. 13th.—That fine Richard, the swell A 1 of Bullingham, is hardly so perfect as Mr. Peele supposes. I, who am such a black sheep, would have scorned to deceive my father as he deceives his. I felt sorry to-day, even for rigid old Peele, when I saw how admiringly he looked at the fellow, and heard him say to a friend something which showed what a son to be proud of he thought him. That handsome girl too, who is her father in petticoats, and chooses to eye me with an imitation of his scandalized propriety,—she simply adores her brother. She has been at home for a few days, from her school, to celebrate his birthday; I saw her walking about with him everywhere, holding his arm, with the air of a devotee. I fancy, if I had an innocent girl clinging to my arm, and thinking all that of me, I would try to be a little more deserving of her! I don't know, though—perhaps I shouldn't. It is easy enough to be deceived in one's self.

"Sept. 15th.—I feel like the man in the iron cage. The weather is so glorious, but I am shut up nearly all day, and cannot enjoy it. Old Brush whines and cries every morn-

ing when I leave him, and never learns that there is no help for it; he always expects to be taken out, and is always disappointed. In the evening we have a run; but I don't like to be long away from my mother. She is so much alone all day, and she grows worse—her weakness frightens me. Still I have not given up hope. The lawsuit comes on in a day or two; I think we are sure to win. If I could keep my mind from dwelling on home, I should be less discontented: but I cannot. It will come,—in dreams at night even more than by day. The wide changeful sky that stretched so gloriously over the land,—that view which I saw with fresh joy whenever I went back,—the woods—they must be beginning to tint, and the shooting is in full force. Yes, and cub-hunting has begun by this time. How melancholy the old house must look, though—all gutted and forsaken. How strange it is to think of a world gone by and dead, as if it had never been! A world to me and my mother:—nothing to any one here.

"Sept. 17th.—If I were at home now, I would be out from morning to night. Oh, for one long day at home! But if my mother could have some country drives in a comfort-

able carriage, I should not care about myself. People tell her how well she looks, and say she should go out more, &c. I can fancy how these Bullingham ladies, who seem in perpetual motion, always in and out of each other's houses, or their own kitchens, or the shops, or the market,—how their gossiping tongues clack about my mother! They think her an indolent fine lady, I can see, and her weakness half nerve and fancy. Well, fortunately their thoughts make no difference to her! for the rest I only wish they were right. But that flush and brightness, which they take for health,—I dare not think what is their true meaning!

"Sept. 30th.—It is all over. The judgment was in to-day's paper. The codicil is pronounced null and void.

"Oct. 1st.—The £100 was all a myth. No hope, no help, for my mother. There must be a curse upon us.

"Oct. 3rd.—I shall have to stand by and see her die, as a pauper dies, for want of skill. I dare not look forward, lest I should grow desperate—and then what would become of her? Mother—mother——!

"Oct. 6th.—For days I had given up prayer; but my mother's agony drives me to

it again. If no other help come, at least a merciful God cannot deny some ease to her sufferings. The pain is in His Hands—He *can* still it.

"Oct. 9th.—It is terrible to watch intense pain, and be powerless to relieve it. When one of these paroxysms of anguish comes on, it will have its way—its omnipotent, raging way. When at last it wears itself out, she is so exhausted that her life seems nearly gone. I stint in every possible manner to get her wine, brandy, beef-tea, jelly, &c.—and those preserve her strength in some measure—at least wind her up for the next turn on the rack. I wish I could manage altogether without meat; but I find I cannot: and it would never do for me to strike work.

"Oct. 12th.—The Bulkleys left England yesterday for the winter. One feels rather forlorn, to have no friend within reach. But I breathe more freely when I think of a thousand miles between me and Jessie.

"Oct. 20th.—Browning told me, as gently as possible, that I must try to give up hope. Even H——could not save her now. It is only a question of time.—I cannot realize it. She is easier, too, to day.

"Oct. 22nd.— What will it be in this world, when my mother is in another? My one friend gone. Gone into that impenetrable silence which swallowed up my father. I was spoiled, I may say idolized, for twenty-two years.—Fate is making up for it now.

"Oct. 30th.—If I saw even a worm in torture, I would rescue it. And here is not a worm, but a human being, a human organization of body and mind, finely strung, with infinite capacities for suffering—capacities intensified by the habits of the position in which it was born,—here is this being racked and torn with anguish, and its Creator —Who alone can help it—seems deaf and blind to all. God forgive me if I speak irreverently! — but oh, why is it?—why, why, why? I pray continually. How easy it would be to Him to send relief! Some say that pain is sent to purify the soul. But if God be Omnipotent, why should He choose so fearful a method of purifying? If He be merciful, as they say, how can He look unmoved upon such torture of a tender woman? If I could suffer it instead, that would be another matter. Or even if I did not pray; but I do. Oh, that sky—so blue, so silent, so cold!

"Nov. 4th.—Snow in the air, and my mother feels it sadly. These rooms are now as draughty as they were close in the summer. A kind note from Lady Thorne, inviting her there. But she could not travel; she can scarcely cross the room now, without pain.

"Nov. 7th.—To-day, as I sat by her, she asked me to fetch her Bible. She said that she must find out something of the world to which she was going. I could scarcely get into the passage before I burst out crying like a baby. Sometimes, womanish as it is, I catch myself wishing that I were indeed a babe once more, and could cry it all out on her breast.

"Nov. 15th.—Every day the sun rises and sets; and the stars come out at night: otherwise I should sometimes think that God had forgotten the world. Yet what egotism to think the world forgotten, because one's own small centre-point is ruffled! An atom more or less, what is it? Yet each of those atoms can suffer; and some of them suffer doubly, a thousandfold, in seeing each other suffer. Are we atoms to God? doesn't He care, as His great purposes sweep on their way?—'His purposes shall ripen fast, unfolding

every hour.' I can hear our old Copeland voices piping that out now, in the old church! Ah, those words were nothing to me, then. Now, as I think of them, a stern, relentless power rises, high and calm, doing His own Will, at all hazards to poor humanity. Yet is not humanity the work of His Hand? I will pray still: though every day it is harder.

"Nov. 22nd.—A sky of gray ink,—all the ugly houses rising like glum ghosts in their rows — sludge in the streets — a few sad-coloured leaves forlorn on the long-armed trees. This without: and within, my mother, day after day, night after night, in pain. Poor old Brush is gloomy like the rest. I work on like a coffee-mill, to grind the family food.

"Christmas Day.—I went to church in saintly fashion, to please my mother. What mockery it all seemed! The church dressed up with holly and ivy — the Bullingham families, sleeker than ever, in attendance— boys and girls come home from school, all as pleased as Punch. One young fellow reminded me of myself,—old Browning's son, on leave from his regiment. He looked as I felt, the Christmas before last—as if care were a popular delusion. The organ pealed,

the hymns and chants were all praise: it was more than I could stand. I slipped out before the sermon, in spite of old Churchwarden Peele glancing daggers from his seat near the door. I should have made a fool of myself, if I had stayed; that cursed desk-work must unhinge my nerves. The sky was wonderfully blue—crystal gems of frost on the trees. I don't know where I went,—but away from Bullingham; and I saw Copelands all the time—and our old church bright with holly-berries—and the people curtseying and pulling their forelocks, as we came out at the door, and wishing us a merry Christmas,—and the pool prime for skating,—and my father and mother looking on, while I opened their Christmas presents. I seemed to be walking in a dream; when I went back, my mother from her sofa smiled, and beckoned me to kiss her, and gave me a little packet—a curious seal which she had hunted up from old treasures. She was free from pain, then, and almost happy; but my brain and heart felt frozen like the earth. Next Christmas, where will that white face be, which smiled at me from the sofa?

"Jan. 25th.—What a month has gone by! How much longer can this misery last? I

have prayed till I could pray no more: but never any pity.

"Feb. 2nd.—A dreadful night; and to-day I cannot leave her. She is hardly herself at times—but she always knows me; and it soothes her to hold my hand. If it were not selfish, I would to God that I could keep her even as she is now. But I am ship-wrecked—and my one plank is floating from under me.

"Feb. 5th. — Pain — pain — pain. Oh, mother, would that I could bear it for you! Or if I could ease you by fifty years of penal servitude, I would gladly give them. But there will be no rest for you till you are in your grave, mother, my cherished mother!

"Feb. 7th.—She is sinking; and it is almost peace, after all that she has suffered. Peace at least for her: her pain is gone. Her life is ebbing gently. Oh, that I could go with her!

"Feb. 8th.—There was a star, one large bright star, glowing and paling, in a calm winter sky. She saw it from her bed, where she lay propped up with pillows—and pointed to it as she held my hand, and smiled faintly. Still watching it, her eyes closed, and she seemed to sleep. The last time, oh, my

mother, that I should see those eyes which loved me so well. Who will ever love me as she did? I sat on by her, watching that cold bright star, as she had watched it, a lump like a stone in my breast. I was glad that she should sleep after her pain: I never dreamed that it was death. But the star seemed to smile and mock me. Perhaps it did: who knows? There is no mockery like that mocking sky. I looked at her to see if she were waking, and found that her breathing had ceased. I put my hand upon her heart; it was beating no more. My other hand was still clasped in hers—I drew it away, but she made no movement, as before, to take it back. No—she was gone. She is sleeping there still, a sheet over her face.

"Feb. 13th.—They laid her in her grave to-day. The sleet pattered on the coffin. Some one behind me whispered, "Poor young fellow!" I did not wonder when I came home, and, standing over the fire, caught sight in the dull mirror, of a dark thin young chap, and found he was myself. My mother's sofa was there—her work-basket and scent-bottle lying beside it on the table.

The sleet still beat against the windows; but all beside was silent. As I looked drearily round the room, old Brush sidled from under the table-cover, and looked up at me and whined.

"Feb. 16th.—Come back to me, come back to me, my mother. Oh, where are you, mother, my beloved? Through all our troubles hitherto, at least we were together. But now blackness of darkness lies between us — a gulf I cannot fathom. Mother—mother—my heart aches—my life is a pain. I am afraid to sleep, because when I wake it comes with such startling force upon me. And the world goes on, the dreary Bullingham world,—and I have to go out into it—and when I come back, there is the empty sofa, and the whole silent room.

"Feb. 21st.—An unexpected letter from Jem Waters. He has come into the title—his brother died last Christmas in a fit,—I was too miserably taken up, to notice it. Jem insists on paying the legacies cut off by his brother's meanness: he says he knows, whether his mother's mind were infirm or no, that such were her intentions—and especially as regarded ourselves. Indeed, hearing of our misfortunes, she had begged just at last

to add another hundred, which he encloses. So here I have it in my hand,—a cheque for £200. It is good and honourable of old Jem. But oh, when I think of the past! What would this money have been to me, five months ago? Oh, I must go out—I must get away—the thought maddens me.

"Feb. 22nd.—I sat up till two o'clock, revolving my plans. My mind is made up. I will go abroad, and live on this £200 till it is gone,—then find some other work. At the worst, I can enlist — though I haven't heart for it, yet. Here I am alone among strangers—some, downright enemies, or as bad. How can I be anything but a black sheep while old Peele and his cronies look at me day after day in this way? I will go,—and get quit of them all.

"March 12th.—Fortunately Mr. Peele has a friend whose son is ready to step into my place: so I shall be free in a fortnight. He informs me that I need not apply to him for a character—or whatever they are pleased to call it. He says he cannot forget what, against his better judgment, he consented, for Mr. Bulkley's sake, to condone. I managed my tongue, and that was all: at the moment he looked old and tired, or I

believe I might have knocked him down. Afterwards I went away out of the town. and ran for a mile without stopping, and even so could hardly work off my rage. Then I lay on her grave for an hour in the dark, thinking of her, and father, and home.

"March 26th.—The Bulkleys have come back. I went to day to wish him good-bye; he is 'a fine old English gentleman, all of the olden time.' Yes, I would die for him, if that would do him any good. As I left the house, I saw Jessie looking from an upper window. I stalked on, without noticing her. Oh, that I could forget her existence!

"March 27th.—I left a wreath of lilies, my mother's favourite flower, on her grave. Daisies are springing up in the grass; the marble cross is finished, and in its place. It seemed so strange to think that she was lying close by me, and could not hear my voice when I bade her good-bye, or know that I was going! This £200, come too late, might have saved her. I never forget that thought, night nor day.

"April 18th.—I have found a quiet room in a Swiss valley, with a clean woman, who asks no questions, and lets me live as I like. I live roughly enough—eking out my money.

Every day, for hours and hours, I sit alone on the mountain side, and think. My ideas —they have all been shaken up and confused —I am trying to collect them. What am I? What is my future life to be? Where are my father and my mother? What became of those fruitless prayers—in which all my strength went out?

"April 25th.—I never knew in old days that the soul was capable of such anguish. I have paroxysms of it sometimes, like my mother's physical paroxysms. I wake in the night, and all is still, and the great mountains rise around me:—my heart cries, 'Mother—mother'—and then suddenly, all fresh again comes the sense that she is not. Last night I could not bear it—I felt overwhelmed—I could hardly help crying aloud, like a hysterical girl. I opened my window, and jumped out,—it is only a few feet to the ground: then I went away alone to the mountain. There was a sound of waters falling down the gorges: no other. The stars shone in full glory, but no moon. Just below, in the shadow, lay the little burial-ground of the hamlet, its wooden crosses standing up like spectres of the night. What stories of sickness, death, parting, cluster

round those crosses! If they could speak, and tell each its own tale! This world, this awful world, seems formed to be a plaything for some malignant spirit, who creates for the pleasure of torturing: just as I have seen bullying fellows of old school-days. There's such a sarcasm in it all—a grim making game of human creatures, and all they love best. Yesterday I heard some men talking about an avalanche last winter—how it came down in the night, on the other side of the mountain, and swept a whole village away. And yet in the same breath these unthinking peasants speak of 'le bon Dieu!' But I am fast, from all I feel and see, coming to the conclusion that our Creator, be He whom He may, has never verbally revealed Himself to man: that our common beliefs are only a new form of the old heathen mythologies—that the God our theologians describe so glibly, is a grand Myth:—perhaps suggested by that very spirit who is allowed such sway, to the minds he revels in deluding.

"May 4th.—There was a storm to-day, and I was out in it, among the mountains, watching the lightning play, and hearing the thunder. I should not much have cared if one of the great flashes had struck me,—I

feel too desperate to care, either way. It was grand: the sudden flame lighted up all the snowy peaks, and was gone: and then the thunder rolled from height to height. It spoke—to me—of something terrible in Nature, something relentless. What are we, against that Omnipotence? Puny specks, with heads and hearts infinitely too great for us, busy about our little schemes, hoping, planning, praying. And there above us, it moves on its way—awful, unchangeable: like the avalanche, which regards not the bereaved—or the thunderstorm, which has no mercy for frightened women. We cling to one another; but that Power sweeps along—and we are torn asunder—one left, the other vanished. We may defy Fate, but it only mocks us, and makes it ridiculous to ourselves and others. The only way to endure life is to care for nothing: but then, is that possible? There is the question! Oh, this mysterious instrument of torture, the human heart!

"May 6th.—

> 'Ah, Christ, that it were possible
> For one short hour to see
> The souls we loved, that they might tell us
> What and where they be!'

Sometimes it seems to me that if there were pity in that Power unknown, this aching desire for my mother could not remain unsatisfied. Oh, it is more than desire,—it is '*sehnsucht*'—it is anguish. She would speak to me if she could; if she could escape, she would come to me. 'Ah, Christ!' those words begin. Without doubt Christ existed, but what was He? Only a man: otherwise He would help. The story of His life is so beautiful,—He was so kind, so pitiful, so gracious! Yes, if this world were in His Hands, as some pretend, help would soon come. He was a wonderful Man—but impotent like the rest. He suffered, He strove,—but He too was swept away in the storm. Only His Nature was so exquisite—so full of fortitude, yet of sweetness—so deeply reverential to the Being in Whom He trusted,—that He did not rebel, as I do. I am not holy, like Him; but weak and passionate:—only a little like Him in suffering. He believed, and converted others to His Belief: but what came of it? He could not really have risen again; He cannot be indeed at God's Right Hand: or He would contrive help, some way or another. No, it was a dream—a delusion,—brought about by some

means now too long past to penetrate. Oh, that it had been true! that He were alive indeed, and had seen my mother suffer! I should not now be what I am.

"May 20th.—I see strange things in my wanderings. In the lower forms of Nature, endless means and diversities of suffering; the creatures prey upon each other, as men do, but without men's restraints: the strong devour the weak; the weak lead lives of terror, and die daily a hundred deaths. A mask of beauty covers all: to those who do not think, how lovely the world is! It was lovely once to me, and seemed all that I desired. But even the little flowers are trampled down and overshadowed by stronger forms of vegetation. Might makes right in this universe; lives rise and fall in proportion to their inherent power of fighting. Caprice and disorder are everywhere. I am sick of it all: yet I believe that this gloomy mood would melt like a dream, if only I could find myself at Copelands, with my mother, strong and well, in her old place.

"October.—B—— in Italy.—I have made up my mind. I will face my life like a man, expect the worst, and harden myself. I

have learned bitter lessons; I must take care to profit by them. I put my faith in prayer; and it disappointed me. I believed in that girl, Jessie; and she has turned out all but a fiend. I, for my part, should be a fool, if I allowed myself to trust in anything any more. If I can crush out all heart, I shall manage pretty well. A new means to make an honest penny has turned up. I have got lately into the habit of scribbling; and a month ago, as my money began to dwindle, I worked up one or two sketches of queer scenes observed in my travels, and sent them to the editor of the ——. To-day comes a cheque, and a polite note requesting more. I see plenty now which I can turn in this way to account; and it is jolly—if anything could ever be jolly again—to be roaming about by myself, as the spirit moves me. Not one of my old cronies knows where I am; the Peeles are no longer scandalized by sight or sound of me.

"Dec.—Saw in the distance Miss Bulkley, fat as ever, driving with a friend. No doubt they are wintering abroad again; probably that serpent is with them; also in these parts I may meet other friends, at this season, if I stay. I will accept that tra-

velling correspondency, and be off at once to America.

"Feb. 8th.—(Fourteen months afterwards.) —England once more. I am sick of travelling. I must settle somewhere, if only in a hole. To-morrow I go by the first train to try for this berth at Alton. I thought my heart was almost stamped out; but here in its native soil it torments me as of old. Last night, the second anniversary of my mother's death, I stood beside her grave. It was late, but the moon had not risen; I pulled my hat over my eyes, and muffled my chin in a comforter—and no one recognized me; I walked eight miles from W——, and went straight to that quiet cemetery. The marble cross had lost its newness; the grass was green and thick. How still it was! the old longing rose and cried; the old silence struck with the same chill. Is she dust by this time, I wonder? is nothing left of the mother whom I loved? The star which I remembered was there, looking just as two years ago. All came back to me in a flash, as though it had only just happened; my travels seemed like a dream. I stood there for a long time—I don't know how long,—

all the rest of the world was to me unutterably forlorn; my one broken fragment of home was under my feet. I had to go at last; as I turned away, another white stone stared me in the face; I caught the name of Peele,—paused and read two names:—old Peele's and Richard's. Both dead and gone, like my mother! Mr. Peele in March of last year, eleven months ago; Richard, two months before him. I feel still like a man in a nightmare."

CHAPTER XVIII.

"'Twill end, girl, end; no cloud across the sun
But passes at the last, and gives us back
The face of God once more."

Charles Kingsley.

The record ended abruptly as it began; and Marjory was free to meditate. She turned the leaves of the little book over and over, noting once more the hurried and blotted entries, telling their own tale of tumult in the mind from which they came. She longed to be a child again, that she might run to him and tell him—many things; her heart was throbbing with a strange medley of fear, of hope, of sympathy that was almost pain. It was long since any one had been near her; but she did not feel lonely; she did not even observe how time was going. When at length a knock came at the door, she heard it as in a dream.

"Miss Stanhope, my dear, are you awake?" said Bellhouse, softly. In her arms was a child, a beautiful boy of five years old or upwards. As Marjory gazed at

him, the eyes that looked back appeared to blend with her dream. They were hazel eyes —Jessie's eyes—the same which had gazed down on her that first evening, as she lay in this very bed; which had sparkled so brightly while the foolish young tongue ran on about Lady Burleigh. Fair eyes; of which—and their visions—these their counterpart were all that remained.

Here, too, was the chestnut hair, admired by little Marjory; rippling across the childish forehead in waves like those which Jessie had exultingly noted, when she numbered her attractions in the glass. The whole face was an infantine copy of Jessie's, differing only in expression—which was simple, open, innocent, as befitted its age. Withal, it had a look of another face—a likeness which Marjory saw vaguely, but could not decipher.

"Here he is, ma'am," said Bellhouse, looking from the child to Marjory, and then at the child again, with a mixture of sorrow, yet of pride: "And it's wonderful, and what I call a mercy from the Almighty, to see how he takes to his old grandmother!"

As she spoke, she kissed him fondly, while he, enthroned in her arms, passed a chubby hand around her neck, and rested

his chestnut head against her, still staring with wide-open eyes at Marjory.

"The lovingest thing that ever was! He had his tea so comfortable! sitting on my lap: the jam won his heart straight off. That good woman, Mrs. Jelly, she must have talked to him, and incensed him, and now he don't look on me like a stranger. Oh, Miss Stanhope, my dear, it's past belief! the years seem to have gone back; and here am I with my Jessie a child again! Only he's in a way more loving than Jessie ever was, even as a little one."

She looked at him again, and hugged him again; and then the tears gushed forth; but amid her tears she smiled. Healing had fallen at last upon this tried and widowed heart; even earthly healing, come in the course of nature, in God's good time.

"I've been so grieved, Miss Stanhope, my dear, to leave you for so long! but I thought it would be best to keep away for a bit after seeing Mr. Hugh. I didn't know what to believe, and what not; and I felt flustered alike; afraid of turning your mind the wrong way, be it the one way or the other. So I just shut myself up alone, and prayed to the Almighty."

"Bellhouse," said Marjory, earnestly, "I am quite certain that Mr. Vivian is utterly innocent. I have had a note from him, and something else which explains—I'll tell you all I can, to-morrow."

"Well, my dear, well! I trust it may be so; I do trust it—and I do wish it;—that he knows. He'll be coming back just now, to see Mrs. Jelly; and it seems to me, ma'am, that one look at this darling must melt his heart, and make him tell the truth, if he hasn't told it already. I can't think as any mortal could resist him!"

"How long has Mrs. Jelly been here?"

"About an hour, ma'am. I would have sent you word, but I was so taken up. She is all agog to see Mr. Hugh; and waiting for him now by my fire; and I've got my poor Jessie's little crib all ready for the darling."

"Bellhouse, you will be sure to come afterwards, and tell me what has happened? And will you give Mr. Vivian this from me?"

She had torn a scrap of paper from his own envelope, and in pencil had hastily scribbled on it these words:—

"I believe in you utterly. M. S."

She twisted it into a tiny billet, and pressed it upon Bellhouse.

"Very well, ma'am," said the good old nurse, after a slight hesitation; "I will give it—I know you would do nothing but what is right."

Marjory thanked her, kissed the pretty boy, and was soon once more in solitude.

"He shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday." Those words floated continually before her, bringing, at least in some degree, confidence and peace. Surely the deep waters would not always overwhelm that spirit, shown by its own confessions to be in reality so good and true, capable of such depth of devotion,—so noble, however faulty. Now, when she had cause to hope that his lost faith was reviving, he would surely not be suffered to sink a second time! help would arise—proof would be found of his innocence.

Another hour, almost two hours, had gone by, before Bellhouse's step was heard again in the passage. As the door softly opened, Marjory started up in her bed.

"Well, Miss Stanhope, my dear; it is all right. Everything is explained; and Mr. Hugh is as innocent as you are."

"Thank God!" cried the girl, sinking back. Until this moment she had not known

how heavy was the weight on her mind. The relief, proportionately great, now almost overwhelmed her. She could ask no questions; she could only gaze at Bellhouse, waiting to hear her story.

"I can't bear to excite you, my dear, at this time of night," said Bellhouse, anxiously; "but I know you would not sleep if I did not tell you; so I must make it as short as I can. Well, ma'am, Mr. Hugh came in; and first of all, I gave him your scrap of paper; and whatever you wrote on it, ma'am, I can't say, but the moment he read it, his face changed, and he looked somehow as if it was nothing to him any more, what any of us thought of him. That gave me my first hope; and then, when he set his eyes on the child, I felt that I could not believe him guilty. It was the way he looked at the darling,—not struck, or moved in his conscience—only a bit curious, and surprised to see such a likeness of my Jessie. Oh, my dear! if he had done as we feared, not the being his child alone, but the living picture of its mother as it is—that must have cut him to the heart! But after the first glance, he took no more notice; and then he and Mrs. Jelly began to talk; and when I came

back, after taking the little one to his bed, there they were with a tin box before them, and Mr. Hugh just about to open it.

"'Bellhouse,' he says, 'Mrs. Jelly has delivered this box to me, in my character as your daughter's husband. If I be her husband, I have a right to open the box, which, as she told Mrs. Jelly, is full of his private papers.'

"I had not known of this, my dear; for you'll remember it's not spoken of in Miss Peele's letter; but Mrs. Jelly nodded to me that all was right; and I could see a look in her face as if she was sorely puzzled, and half believed in him herself, though she could not tell how the mistake arose."

"Yes!" said Marjory, listening breathlessly.

"Then, ma'am, he opened the box. It was hard work; for the lock is not a common one—and the key was rusty, through lying unused. But at last, open it came: Mrs. Jelly and me standing by. And there, my dear, at the very top lay a blotting-book belonging to Mrs. Jelly, which she knew in a minute, and had missed since the day before my poor Jessie died, when it was lying on Jessie's table. She had hunted high and

low, and never could think what became of it; but now it seemed plain that Jessie had opened the box, while she was writing on that last evening, and in her hurry, when she was taken faint, locked up the book in a mistake."

"Then she might have locked up some of her own letters?"

"So Mr. Hugh said; and Mrs. Jelly and me, we saw it directly. The faintness came on all of a sudden, and no doubt she locked the box, for fear her husband's secrets should be spied. Well, inside the book, was half-a-dozen sheets of writing paper; and among them, ma'am, a letter—looking just like the one which came directed to Mr. Hugh. It was the same coloured foreign paper, and all: only the envelope was one size smaller. Mr. Hugh—he turned it over, and we saw the address—'To my husband.'

"Mrs. Jelly and me, we looked at one another; and Mrs. Jelly said — 'Please, sir, to open it.'—He did so; and there came out the mystery! The letter inside was to Mr. Hugh in his own name. The date was from Mrs. Jelly's lodgings, the same as the other; and then followed the beginning: — 'Mr. Hugh, — I beg you to

excuse the liberty I take in writing to you,' —all proper, and as it should be. It seems, ma'am, that in times past, Mr. Hugh had known her husband; and she thought that he might find a way of getting his right address: you see, Mr. Hugh and she—they played together as children, and she had known him all her life, and knew his kindness. It appears that she had somehow offended him while she was at Ripley; for first of all in the letter, she begs his pardon, and humbles herself in a way which—oh, my dear! I was thankful to the heart's core to find. And yet, ma'am, it cuts me too to think how that proud spirit must have been lowered; but the Almighty knew best. My prayer that she might have a humble heart—Yes, He took His own way to form it in her!"

She paused, her voice carried away by the tears which flowed afresh, as she realized in some degree, the extent of her Jessie's sufferings. But the momentary agitation past, she continued with her usual calmness.

"Well, ma'am, after the apologies, she gives particulars about her marriage and her husband, and begs of Mr. Hugh to bring or send him to her at Dover. She says that

the boy's second name—the name by which she intends him to be known—is Copelands: chosen partly as atonement for her offence —whatever that might be,—and partly to remind Mr. Hugh of the past: thinking that if ever he were rich again, as, some day, she said, might happen,—and if she died,—he would be a friend to the poor baby, called after his old home. Then she goes on to mention that she encloses a letter for her husband; which, if it cannot be delivered to him, she begs returned. No doubt, ma'am, that was the letter found in the box. I told you, if you remember, that the envelope was a smaller size — just fit to enclose in the other."

"And she had put each letter in the other's envelope!"

"There can be no question, ma'am, but that was it: especially as in her letter to Mr. Hugh, she says her husband's name: quite a different person altogether from Mr. Hugh himself,—and one, Miss Stanhope, my dear, that we had best forget; for he is gone to his judge: he died, ma'am, long ago."

"Then Mr. Vivian's innocence is proved beyond any possibility of doubt?"

"Certainly, ma'am: and if more proof

was wanted, which it isn't, there is the box. The rest of the box is filled with papers, as my poor Jessie said—all in that name as she told Mr. Hugh: letters from all manner of people, bills unpaid, memorandums, and the like. I saw enough of them to find that the most were far from to his credit, and that there was little wonder my poor girl wished to hide them. A pretty state, I doubt not, he was in, when he found he had left that box behind him! — but may be he never remembered where—and the Almighty took safe care of it. The Almighty knew, Miss Stanhope, my dear, that it would come in useful at the last. Poor dear Mr. Hugh! I could willingly have begged his pardon on my knees: and Mrs. Jelly, she downright cried."

"Oh, I am so glad! I am so glad!" Marjory could not help repeating, again and again, like a child. Her heart was brimming over with thankfulness, relief, a thousand nameless feelings. The vague fear which for so long had troubled her, had melted into nothing. He was clear, not in her eyes only, but in the eyes of all the world. Neither Lina, nor any other, could cast in this matter the shadow of a stone at him, any more.

"There was one thing beside, ma'am, which I should like you to see," said Bellhouse, after a pause. "I'll just show it to you to-night; and then I need never trouble you with this sad business again."

She handed to Marjory a paper partly covered by poor Jessie's writing,—a faint and feeble scrawl, too clearly showing the sickness of her heart.

"Oh, my dear mother," it said, "how I have wanted you!—and yet I have never written to you since my trouble, and you do not know where I am. Mother, when I married, I believed that I should soon come to you in silks and jewels, with servants of my own, and show that my old fancies were not so foolish as you had thought them. I often looked forward to that day, when I should come as a lady to Thorne:—and when I was left, as you will hear, alone in a far country, I could not bear that you should know how low I had fallen. Then he had taken the marriage register, and I thought, if I went home, there was no telling what folks might say—some of them that were so nasty, when I lived with you. That stuck-up Davies, and Jane at the Parsonage, and a many more; I knew they would all glory

over me. So I have gone on, from day to day and week to week, hoping for my husband to come back. It was mainly through jealousy—but a fancy, after all,—that he left me. He is a real gentleman, mother, of high birth—and so grand and handsome! though he did deceive me by saying his name was Russell. I never knew his real name till he was gone, and I looked into a box of his papers. But never mind, I forgive him; and, mother, my troubles are nearly over. I feel it in my chest, and the doctor says it; so I hope you will forget my badness, and take care of my poor baby when I am gone. You have been a good mother to me; and many's the time I've thought of your prayers, —and at last I thought I would pray too. Yes, mother, I disappointed you in all else;— and I did not want your prayers to be disappointed. So I have gone Where you taught me, for mercy; and I think I have found it. I am easy now in my mind, mother; and I believe I am forgiven."

This was all. Whether written merely as a vent for an overcharged heart, or as the beginning of a letter to be sent some day, was not apparent; but be this as it might, the words had filled a blank which Bellhouse had

never thought to see filled on earth. And now at the close of this day of varied emotions, peace was on her brow; her eyes, though swelled with crying, were calm; her whole countenance was that of one from whom a load has passed away. Her erring child was safe, waiting to welcome her, among the others who had gone before; her prayers of long ago shone back on her, rich in blessing. And she was alone in the world no longer; another child of her own blood had come to brighten her old age.

Involuntarily, when Marjory gave back the blotted paper, she clasped her arms around Bellhouse's neck, as she had done when a child.

"I can never forget your kindness, Miss Stanhope, my dear," said Bellhouse.

"Nor I yours," responded Marjory.

Neither would she ever forget the lesson which she had learned this night: that, albeit after many days—days however stormy—it shall be well at length with them that fear God.

Bellhouse had taken her candle, and was turning to go, when Marjory called her back.

"Bellhouse, one question—I was thinking so much about——the others, that I forgot to ask the real husband's name?"

"My dear, I kept from mentioning it on purpose, lest it should put you about. It's a very sad thing; and strange: but there'll be no need, as he's dead and gone, to publish it."

"But pray tell me—or I shall be wondering all night.

"Well, my dear," said Bellhouse, coming close to the bed—"I'm grieved beyond everything for the young lady—and she so kind too! it will be a heavy blow for all the family. But the name in my poor Jessie's letter to Mr. Hugh, and likewise on all the bills and papers,—that name," said Bellhouse, lowering her voice—"was the name of Richard Peele."

CHAPTER XIX.

"Now, by experience taught, . . assured
That God, who takes away, yet takes not half
Of what He seems to take ; or gives it back,
Not to our prayer, but *far beyond* our prayer."

Wordsworth.

The sun shone brightly after the storm ; the bitter wind was silent : the blue sky stretched above the leafless trees. Marjory went downstairs this morning ; and Mr. Robinson, who called early, gave permission for her journey to Rockswold on the following day but one. She could not have told, if questioned, whether such permission made her sorry or glad : she was conscious only of a strange fondness for the old house, and a sad regret in thinking that she must leave it, to enter it perhaps never more. In each solitary room by turns, occasional fires were lighted ; to-day there was a fire in the hall, in the billiard-room, in the old library ; Marjory wandered to and fro among them, thinking of days gone by, peopling the empty places with forms long mouldered into dust.

Bellhouse and Mrs. Jelly sat together in the old servants' hall. Mrs. Jelly was to remain at Thorne a day or two, until the boy was accustomed to his new surroundings; and in his behalf the housekeeper's room was exchanged for this barer but more spacious region. The wide uncarpeted floor formed a splendid playground for the little one, who raced to and fro, with his wooden horse and his ball, while the two women, now one and now the other, looked constantly from their work to watch and admire. Here also, as in the day, was calm after storm. Marjory had looked in upon it, with a glow of pleasure; but now, as she roamed about the silent house, the contrast made it more lonely.

The sun was shining full through the long windows of the billiard-room: which, like those of the drawing-room and dining-room, opened upon the terrace. Marjory sat in one of the deep old window-seats, and looked about her. There was a faintly musty odour in the room; the long billiard-table was covered with holland, under which the net pockets were turned up. She remembered, as a child, knocking the balls about, and watching, with strange fascination, the

polished orbs roll from end to end of the table. From the opposite wall, old portraits stared fixedly upon her. There was one of a dark, belted soldier of the Roses, which had often chilled her childish blood, as she met his stern, deep gaze. He was gazing still, just the same, his hand on the hilt of his sword; she felt again a shadow of the same shrinking:—ghostly presences seemed all about her, broad daylight though it were. The step of a living man in the hall, came with a sense of relief. That quick tread, so light, yet so strong,—surely she knew it! He had entered through the glass door in the drawing-room, and was going towards Bellhouse's domains when, in passing the billiard-room, he saw Marjory. He stopped short, flushing all over his brown face, his dark eyes suddenly lightened.

"Miss Stanhope! You here! May I come in?" In another moment her hand was held fast in his familiar clasp: his, for whom she had so craved and pined during those dreary months at Alton. Just thus his image had stood often in her dreams; now he himself was here: how kind he looked, she thought —how strong, how full of life! But a little while ago, youth and the world had seemed

dead to her: and now here they were reviving, the old fire was springing up, merely at the sight of his face, the sound of his voice, the touch of his hand.

"I thought I should never be able to see you," he said. "The time has seemed unbearable."

"Mr. Robinson kept me upstairs, but I am free now; and I am going home the day after to-morrow."

"If you don't catch cold meanwhile, wandering about this old house. How dreary it all is, isn't it? at least, it has been dreary, until now; but now you bring back life. It seems only the other day that you were sitting just here in this same place, staring at yonder soldier as if you expected him to come down and devour you."

"I was just thinking of it," said Marjory: "But it doesn't seem 'the other day' to me; it seems long, long ago. How different everything is, since then! The whole world is changed."

"Don't say that," he said, drawing one of the old leather-covered chairs near her window. "Not in that tone. Perhaps the change is only seeming."

As he paused, she looked up at him, and met his eyes: fixed upon her with a strange

intensity of gaze. It was as if they had long been craving for the sight of her,—at least as much as hers for the sight of him.

"I have to thank you for something," said he: "That little scrap of a note yesterday evening—I shall keep it for ever and ever."

"It was nothing," said Marjory, blushing deeply: "I could not help writing it; I would have said it instead, if I had seen you."

"And that was before the certain proofs came out; so I prize it more. Have you read what I sent you?"

"Every word of it." She took the little book out of her pocket, as she spoke, and gave it back to him.

"It has not made you despise me?"

"Despise you!" echoed Marjory. She was not herself aware with what emphasis her blue eyes exclaimed against any such possibility. But he looked as if a weight had fallen from his mind; evidently the question had not been without real foundation.

"I was almost afraid you would, when you knew all. I can tell you I have often despised myself. The bare sound of poor Jessie's name has been hateful to me ever

since, because it recalled that time—and that scene with her."

As he spoke, Marjory, remembering all her imaginations concerning those indications which had so often shown in him some painful association with Jessie's name—felt that she had suddenly a new conception of what it must be when two spirits parted on earth by misunderstanding, meet in Paradise face to face.

"You were so strongly tempted," she said: "I don't wonder you yielded for the moment."

"No temptation can excuse swindling in an English gentleman. Remember, I was a swindler for a little while."

"It is all over now," said Marjory: "You must try to forget it."

"I don't think I can ever forget it," he said: "But I am thankful that it has not disgusted you."

"Mr. Vivian, may I ask you one question? You said in your note—'Heaven is no longer an empty name to me.' Is that true?"

His whole countenance deepened and brightened, with a steady brightness; as from some inward sunshine lately dawned, and full of inward cheering.

"It is true," he said reverently: "Thank God it is true." He paused. Then, very gently—

"I owe it all to you."

"To me!" cried Marjory, her blue eyes widening.

"Yes," he answered, looking at her with something not far from adoration—"If rather a long story will not tire you, I will explain."

Marjory could have listened to him for ever, without growing tired, she thought; although this she did not exactly say. He stood up, a little nearer to her, leaning against the window.

"Miss Stanhope, when you were a little child, and saw me here years ago, I was a foolish young fellow, spoiled from babyhood, with strong passions of every kind, and thinking, if I thought at all, that I was only created to gratify them. I had always been accustomed to my own way; I was rich, as I fancied; at any rate, I had plenty of money. Somehow I was a favourite in the regiment as well as at home, and altogether life was a summer's day to me. I never dreamed of its becoming anything more—or less."

"I remember how bright and sunny you were."

"Because I had my own way; that was all. Often since then, I have wondered how I managed to live so entirely without thought; but I had never been trained to thought, and it had not yet been forced upon me—and every day brought some enjoyment or excitement to drive it away. It was at that time, when, as a matter of course, I thought pretty girls formed to be flirted with, that I had that foolish fancy for Jessie. As to love, I knew nothing about that; I had never felt it, or anything near it, then."

The unconscious emphasis of his tone once more raised Marjory's colour. She was not thinking of herself; yet involuntarily the colour came.

"Religion I took, as I suppose nine out of ten young fellows take it, for granted. I was taught what was considered 'the thing,' taken to church on Sundays, and the rest. I supposed it was all very proper, and never troubled my head further about it. Well, then, into the midst of my self-indulgent life, full of luxury, ease, and all that seemed earthly good, came crashing that thundering blow, my father's death, and the loss of all we had. I cannot tell you what it was to find all that I did find, when I came home at

a minute's notice—my world and everything I cared for in it, suddenly split up to shivers. At first I was too utterly stunned to realize it; that came by degrees; every day I seemed to go down deeper into the gulf."

"It must have been terrible."

"I was quite unused to judge for myself in anything of real importance; my poor father had made it his business that I should never have a care. I did not know what to do, or how to manage. Lawyers came about me like harpies; I mistrusted them, and yet had to ask their advice. Then it seemed to me hard and cruel that my father should have been taken so unexpectedly, and when I was so young—before, as I regarded it, I had got anything to speak of, out of life. I felt utterly rebellious against fate, against Providence—I did not call it God. I had to do my best to be a man all at once, instead of a petted boy, to take care of my mother, and hide what I felt from her as much as possible; for she was ill, worse every day. It was an awful time."

"It must have been, indeed."

"Then at last I was launched at Bullingham; and you know what our life was there, and how I turned to prayer as a last re-

source. I see now that I prayed in the spirit in which I had grown up all my life—that of a spoiled and wilful child, who thinks it unjust if he cannot have all his own way. I demanded of God what I desired; when, as I thought, no answer came, I stormed and was angry. You would see from that old journal how I drifted on, until I had no faith left."

"How sorry I should have been if I had known!"

"Would you have cared, even then? Ah, if I had been with you, young as you were, I might never have grown so bad! But of the religious people whom I did see, most appeared to teach one thing and practise another. I believe there is some book called 'Modern Christianity, a Civilized Heathenism.' Just so seemed their religion to me. I had been down into the depths of reality, and I was sickened of humbug evermore. I thought: 'If those smooth lives could be broken up like mine, where would their religion be then?' Some saintly persons were shocked at me, and showed it: that maddened me the more. I thought how cold and unsympathetic religion was! and how odious it made people. I gave up all

prayer; I tried never to think of the next world: religious platitudes in books, sermon, or speech, filled me with loathing. I was wicked, wretched, lost. Then you came to Alton."

He stopped, and looked again at Marjory, as if a flood of recollections rushed in upon him.

"I saw your face at the concert. It was not changed—only intensified—more mind in it, more ardent. It acted upon me like the wand one reads of in the old fairy-tales; at the sight of it, the ice in my heart began to thaw. All that night I dreamed of Thorne, of the days when I had played with you as a pleasant pastime, as a new sort of pet; those days when the world was young and fair to me. Then I met you; and when you found me changed, you did not seem repelled. I felt in your presence as I had never felt in my whole life before; there was no unreality about you; you were in every way genuine, consistent. You were not full of yourself; I discovered very quickly your objects in existence—more quickly than you supposed! I was interested, as a study, in watching them. You were so fresh and natural, so thoroughly in earnest, an oasis in a dried-up world."

"I had no idea you thought all that of me."

"I know you had not,—that was one of the charms. You were wrapped up in ——" he hesitated.

"In Gerald," said Marjory, gently. She shaded her face with her hand, to hide the starting tears.

"I soon found out your enthusiasm in religion. I wondered whether you would have a rough awakening some day, or tame down into formality like others. I watched to see: then after a time, a change came on your brightness.—Miss Stanhope, do you remember wishing that you might go through the same as I, if by that means you could convince me of the truth of your religion?"

"I remember," said Marjory; "How often I have thought of it! I did not know what I wished!"

"Not then. But you knew afterwards. Have you noticed in that journal, the wonderful likeness between your experiences and mine? Sometimes, as I watched you sinking lower into the depths, at those Alton lodgings, I used to imagine that some mocking spirit had taken up your words, and was working them into facts, to please his sardonic fancy."

"What an awful idea!"

"Only one among many of the same kind, which tormented me in those days. Then, at other times, when I saw your utter confidence in prayer, I questioned—If there be anywhere a God of Love, can the faith of this simple child be disappointed?"

"Fancy your thinking so much about me!" said Marjory.

"Why, I have simply lived in you lately. Then I had to stand by and see you suffer, and I could not help you. It half maddened me sometimes. But when I found your prayers all denied, and yet you trusted, and clung on to your faith—that gave me a new idea. Not so much anything you said to me—but the practical faith in your life; that gave me my first lift upward. I was used to words, but not to seeing words lived out. More and more the question forced itself: Why did my faith go so soon? Then I saw that I never had what the Bible of the Christians calls faith; only just a lazy acceptance of what was taught me by others. At last the thought haunted me by night and by day; Have I ever really known anything about true religion? In spite of all your troubles—which seemed so hard for one so young

and pure—you never gave way; to you faith was no mere name, but a real support; as though unseen help held you up. I began to think that there must be a God,—a Creator I never doubted—but a living God; and that He was near to you."

"When was this?"

"About the time I read your story. That it recorded your own experience, was clear enough—to me who had so watched you. I read it again and again, and thought of it continually. It was of value to me because it was real—not conventional, or copied. Then I remembered that you had once asked if I did not think it worth while at least to examine the evidences of the truth of the Bible? I had always scoffed before at the cant phrase, as I thought it, 'faith;' but now I had been forced to own that there might be more in it than I thought. I resolved to follow your suggestion, and study the external proofs of the authenticity of our Bible. I was surprised—and thunderstruck at my own folly—when I found how abundant, and how convincing, they are. Then—do you remember a little prayer which you put into some one's mouth in your story?"

"I think I do."

"It was:—

'*Lord Jesus, if Thou art, reveal Thyself to me!*'

"I felt that the New Testament had at least sufficient warrant to make it worth a trial. Night after night, for hours at a time, I prayed those words, or something like them.—More I need not tell you now—except that the prayer was answered.

"And was it after that, you went to the Cathedral?"

"Why, how did you know I went there?"

"I was there myself," said Marjory.

How well she remembered the mingled agony and joy of that autumn afternoon!

"I had no idea you knew anything about it! I did not tell you, from fear of a mixed motive. Yes, then I had begun dimly to realize that the God of the Bible is no fable, but a living fact: and I thought, before I left Alton, perhaps for ever, I would ask His blessing in His House which I had despised."

He paused; Marjory also was silent, lost in wonder. Now upon all that seemed so cruel, so mysterious, light had dawned! Some day she would have a tale of her own to tell; some day he should know of that childish prayer so long persevered in—"O

Almighty God, bless Mr. Hugh, and make him good." She could not speak of it now; she was lost in the realization that through her means, her bitter sufferings, that prayer had at length been answered; and the work she undertook for Gerald, had been for him instead.

As she raised to him her blue eyes, all bright and shining with that thought, he came involuntarily nearer; the next moment, he was holding her close and fast. Not in the rapture of mere earthly passion did these two hearts which had suffered so deeply, come together at length, but drawn also by a higher and a firmer bond—one which eternity itself cannot sever.

"Dearest Marjory—my beloved—I can't tell you what you are to me—there are no words for it,—but if you will let me try to show you, if the devotion of my whole life can give you any idea."

For answer, Marjory only laid her hand in his, and rested silently within those strong arms. She could not, if she would, have spoken; her heart was too full; she could not even at this instant utter her thankfulness to God.

Some one has said that there are moments

of which the bare remembrance might render it worth while to have lived! One of such moments had arisen upon Hugh Vivian and Marjory. Here in this deserted house, this silent room, while the by-gone faces gazed grimly from the walls—here the misery, the restlessness, the craving of the past, were all forgotten; fleeting like dreams before the blessed reality of the present.

CHAPTER XX.

"Ah! dearest, with a word he could dispel
All questioning, and raise
Our hearts to rapture, whispering all was well,
And turning prayer to praise.
And other secrets too he could declare,
By patterns all divine,
His earthly creed retouching here and there,
And deepening every line."

John Henry Newman.

The great bell in the court-yard, which still rang, as in the time of the little old lady, at one o'clock, startled them back into every-day life.

"Bellhouse will be wondering where I am," cried Marjory.

"And I must go," said Hugh: "I must manage to live without you till to-morrow."

"Not so very long—considering the time you have lived without me hitherto!" said Marjory smiling.

"No, but that must be made up for now. It has been horrible enough, without repetition. To-day, though, I have business which won't wait. By-the-bye, has it never

struck you as at all peculiar that I should turn up again in this sudden way, after wishing you good-bye for ever?"

"I have wondered how it was. Did you lose your work in Russia?"

"Not exactly: but it led to work in England. You must have seen why I had to go away;—if I had stayed, I might have been mean enough, after a while, to make love to you in spite of my poverty."

"I don't think it would have been mean at all. But are you less poor now?"

"My darling! You were ready to face it, then?"

"I am used to poverty, you know; and I thought perhaps I might help you a little by my writing."

"Steadfast to your old dreams!" said he: "No, dear, we shan't need that; I shall have enough for us both, and something to spare. I'll tell you all about it to-morrow."

"You'll come as early as you can? you know I go home the next day."

"I am going with you." Then, as Marjory's eyes flashed in delightful wonder—

"I have arranged it all with your uncle. I wrote for leave to escort you, and he replied that if you had no objection, he had none."

"No fear of my objecting!" said Marjory, with a blush: "I shall have some one to see to my luggage."

The next day was again fair and bright; and when Hugh Vivian arrived, he found Marjory walking up and down on the terrace. After his long years of loneliness, what joy to meet the welcome in her eyes!

"I thought you would never come," she said with her usual naivete.

"And I thought the train would never get to Alton," said he, drawing her hand within his arm.——"The train!"

"I have been to London, and back, since I saw you. I left Paddington at three a.m."

"Oh, how tired you must be!" cried Marjory, full of compunction.

"I never felt fresher in my life. And now I have something to tell you."

"Something about your appointment?"

"Have you any idea what the 'appointment' is? A commercial travellership, in the tallow line, do you think?—as I come from Russia."

"Or in metal chairs and tables, like Mr. Kantwise, perhaps," said Marjory: "I hope it's nothing of that kind, because then you would have to leave me so often!"

"Marjory, how much could we marry upon? Three hundred a year?"

"Just as you think best," said Marjory.

"Well, supposing that we are very careful, and that you worked hard at your writing, and that I sat up at night to review books, and that my salary had a promise of future increase, dare we try it upon £250?"

"I should not be afraid," said Marjory.

"But £50,000 would be better, wouldn't it?"

"Fifty thousand! While we are building castles, let us say at once, a million and a landed estate," cried Marjory.

"No—it is only fifty thousand and the estate," said Hugh quietly.

Something in his tone made her stand still and look at him. His dark eyes seemed all on fire, his face was full of joy; he looked hardly able to contain himself.

"What do you mean?" she asked gazing.

"Marjory, I went to London to meet Mr. Crawford. I had only waited till I could see you, to settle with him finally. It is all done now; and I have bought Thorne of him.—Thorne is mine! and £50,000 a year besides:—'and all that's mine is thine,' Marjory!"

* * * *

When Marjory had in some degree recovered her bewilderment, she heard the history of these wonderful tidings. It was from Mr. Bulkley—who, with some difficulty, had sought out Hugh's address—that the summons to Russia came. Miss Bulkley having died abroad, the survivor had sold his Ripley property, and had gone to reside at St. Petersburgh, where he was interested in commercial undertakings, bequeathed to him by a brother. The kind old man, now alone in the world, was thus at liberty to carry out a long cherished idea: that of making Hugh Vivian his heir. He had been deeply touched by the misfortunes of the boy whom he had known in such different circumstances; when the proud young fellow came to him, full of shame and remorse, to cast himself upon his mercy, that large and tender heart was completely won, and wrung with a generous longing to make amends for all this suffering. It was then that the notion above mentioned had occurred as a pleasing fancy; the old man's nature had a romantic spot, and he had pleased himself by imaginations concerning this unexpected joy. These he talked over with his sister; and Jessie had doubtless overheard some part of their conversa-

tion—resulting in her tacit recommendation of her boy, by the name of Copelands. She knew, and probably exaggerated, Hugh's transient admiration; she knew also the generous nature which would make him charitable, even beyond his wont, to any child of hers, from the dread of any shadow of retaliation against the offence she had implored him to pardon.

When Mr. Bulkley, who had long suffered from an incurable disease, was warned by his doctor that he had but a few months to live, his first step after finding Hugh, was to offer him work at St. Petersburgh: designing thus to obtain some knowledge of his present character before committing himself by signing his will. Had Hugh, on further acquaintance, disappointed him, the fortune would have been divided among charities; but further intimacy only served to deepen the liking conceived long ago. Towards the end of November, the old man, somewhat suddenly, fulfilled his doctor's expectations: Hugh Vivian, whom he had but a few days previously informed of his intentions, waiting upon him like a son, and soothing by all possible means the lonely yet peaceful end.

Since then Hugh had been weekly hoping

to return to England; but endless hindrances had arisen to delay him; and he had only at length reached London on the eve of Gerald Stanhope's funeral. Of this he had heard from Mr. Crawford, with whom he had been in correspondence concerning Thorne. Hugh Vivian was the possible purchaser mentioned by Mr. Crawford to Bellhouse; but his name, by his own special request, had been disclosed to no one: since, little as she then knew it, the final decision depended upon Marjory. Had she refused him, as he afterwards told her, he would have left England for ever.

But now all uncertainty was ended; and Marjory would soon become the mistress of this her ideal world. Copelands was spoiled beyond recovery; but here in the familiar spot which Hugh had loved next best, a new and better life would begin. Here he would found another home, to take the place of the old; here in these deserted walls would again be happiness, and glad voices, and brightness, and love.

"Before we go in," said Marjory, when they had walked long in the wintry sunshine, while again and again she felt unable to believe that she would not presently awake

and find herself dreaming,—"Before we go in, I want to see—the churchyard."

"Aren't you tired?—won't it be too much for you?" said Hugh tenderly.

"No—I shan't be able to come out again to-day, and to-morrow we start. I must see it once before I go."

So he said no more, and they went away through the park, to the palings where, years ago, they had stood together. There was a little gate in the palings now; Hugh opened it, and Marjory entered silently, while below her the brook, swollen by the snow, rushed on over its pebbles. No one was in the churchyard, and no cottages overlooked the quiet part where Gerald's grave had been made. It was very near the spot where that other grave, of that other brother, buried long ago, had been: but that was old now, and lost among the rest. Here was Gerald's, new and alone. The white marble cross planned by Marjory, was not yet in its place; nothing marked it from the other rustic mounds. A little patch of snow, still unmelted, lay upon the grass; the sods were bound down by osiers.

A long while Marjory stood in perfect silence, gazing on that silent turf. Hugh,

standing near, would not speak or move to disturb her. He knew what it is to stand thus above a new-made grave, and yearn with impotent craving for some word, some sign, from the beloved who is gone! Only at last, in a low tone, he spoke his thoughts aloud.

"If this had but come a year sooner, he should have had the desire of his heart."

Then suddenly Marjory clung to him, in a passion of weeping.

At once all had flashed upon her,—Gerald's genius, his hopes, their slow disappointment. Now she was to be rich and prosperous; the money for which they had longed, would be plentiful around her; she would have all that earth could give: while Gerald lay mouldering here.

Not Gerald. No. A moment later she remembered. His dying words came back to her: "Heaven is best." Ah, he would smile at her now, for pitying him!

"Heaven is best—and God's Will is best," she said, looking up at Hugh; "I see it now."

Soon afterwards they turned away. Marjory paused at the palings, with one last lingering look.

"It would not seem so hard to leave him,"

she said, "if it were summer. The graves look so dreary out there in the bitter cold."

"Do you remember some words of your own," said Hugh, "years ago, when you were a little child? We were just in this very place, coming up from the churchyard; and I have never forgotten what you said:—'It's always summer weather in Paradise.'"

So, with that thought, they left him, alone in his calm rest. He had been cut off in his youth, and for them life and joy had opened afresh. But which of them had the better part, was known to none but God.

CHAPTER XXI.

"Serenely purest of her sex that live,
But wanting one sweet weakness—to forgive."
Byron.

And what of Lina?

Lina was still at Dover, basking in the consciousness of verified wisdom. That Hugh Vivian's guilt in the matter of Jessie was clearly proved, she conceived to be beyond question; her mind was now intent upon the next step—how best to trace the connection between this crime, and the forgeries—falsely, she opined, attributed to her brother—through which she believed Mr. Vivian to have procured the needful funds for the luxurious foreign sojourn. She thought it was by a special interposition of Providence, that so much mental employment had been provided for her just at the period of Gerald's death. The blow, she felt, was thus softened. Yet, from time to time, recollections of his gray eyes as they gazed at her, of the tone of his voice, when he spoke to her, of his visions concerning her, came floating back with a vague sadness, a sense

of some treasure gone. Would she ever again be thought of as Gerald had thought of her?—ever loved as he had loved her? —Imprudent as, in looking back, the whole history of their engagement appeared, and clear of blame in any respect as she felt herself to be—yet somehow, something of a glory had faded with Gerald from her earth. She had not known that the glory existed; until lo, it was gone.

And now Mrs. Jelly had to return to Dover, and the Peele family to be informed of the unfortunate facts disclosed by the contents of the box. Bellhouse's joy in her grandson was somewhat damped by the fear of their possible proceedings; she knew not what power they might possess to take her darling from her. But this she was now more than ever willing to "leave to the Almighty;" and Marjory, full of deepest sympathy and consideration for Lina, wrote, every word guided by these sentiments, to break the tidings; enclosing Jessie's letter to Hugh Vivian, found in the box, in which her husband's name and family were clearly mentioned. Of the box itself Mrs. Jelly took charge, promising to deliver it safely at the house of Lina's sister.

Not until some time later, Marjory heard that the result had been a conclave of Peeles; who, after much discussion, and examination of Mrs. Jelly, concluded that Richard was undoubtedly guilty, and that the affair had better be hushed up. They agreed to pay an annual sum, through a lawyer, to Bellhouse, until the boy should be one-and-twenty; in other respects, his existence, being a family disgrace, must be by them ignored.

So, among the elder members of the family, the matter rested; and Bellhouse, well content, remained sole guardian of her treasure. But Marjory was somewhat horrified, one day in March, to receive a letter from Lina, stating that she felt it her solemn duty to urge her friend to reconsider her intended marriage with Hugh Vivian; that, the more she thought of the past, and of Richard's general character, the stronger became her conviction of—somewhere—a deep plot; that although of this no present proof could be found, Richard was innocent,—the box and papers had been stolen from him, and the letter purporting to be written by Jessie, was a forgery.

"If a person can forge one document, he can forge another," wrote Lina.

The supposition was wild in the extreme; and had the circumstances been transferred to some other family, Lina would be the first to counsel silent contempt as its one answer. But Marjory could not bear that any such suspicions, ridiculous though they were, should lurk in any mind concerning Hugh. A day or two later he came to Rockswold, on one of his constant visits; and then she showed him the letter, and told him of all that fabric of imaginations by which Lina had so seriously disturbed her peace, in that winter day's walk at Alton.

He listened more gravely than she had expected. Once or twice, while she spoke, his face clouded, as though some word struck home; at the end he was silent for a time, and then sighed heavily.

"Ah!" he said, "there is no telling what may come of one false step in life! You know now, Mr. Peele's reason for doubting me; and, by the way, Mr. Bulkley told me at St. Petersburgh, that my leaving Bullingham just at that particular time was unfortunate, for the father had evidently a strong suspicion that, in some way, I was mixed up in Richard's forgeries."

"How unjust!" cried Marjory, indignantly.

"It was the man's nature. 'Give a dog a bad name, and hang him'—that was his maxim,—and he has handed it down to Miss Peele. My dear old friend Bulkley told me that he had to advise him to wait till he had something to go upon, before dragging my name into the matter. After that, he became more cautious; but Mr. Bulkley saw that he was strong on my scent! He found out nothing, though."

"For the very good reason that there was nothing to find," replied Marjory, still indignant: "But was it only from the wandering of his mind, I wonder, that, after reading his son's letter, he said to Lina—'It is just as I thought?'"

"I strongly suspect," said Hugh, "that that letter was a confession of the whole affair—Jessie and everything—and that this caused Mr. Peele's illness. As to the remark you mention, it seems not unlikely that Richard's knowledge of Mr. Bulkley's leniency to me, gave him courage in his own proceedings. His father told him everything in the way of business. That idea is possible, at least."

"I wish the letter could have been found!"

cried Marjory: "I do so long for Lina to see your innocence!"

"As to that, flights so purely imaginative are really not worth a thought," said Hugh, with something of a smile: "But how was the letter lost? tell me again about it, darling."

Marjory repeated the story, branded only too deeply on her memory; and a day later Hugh went off to Bullingham, to examine the room which had once been Mr. Bulkley's study.

The house was now portioned into offices: the young surveyor who rented the room in question, was very civil to his distinguished-looking visitor; a new-comer, he had little knowledge of past affairs in Bullingham. On hearing of the missing letter, he pointed out a crack in the mantel-piece, observing that he could not tell how large, or how small, it had been all those years ago; it was scarcely noticeable when he engaged the room—but had widened.

Hugh examined the place: the crevice lay between the wood of the old-fashioned mantel-shelf, and the wall. Marjory had repeated Lina's description of her father's attitude: had the crack indeed been then wide enough

to receive the letter, it was quite possible that thus it had dropped from his nerveless fingers. His elbows, resting heavily upon the shelf, must for the moment have widened the aperture: which afterwards, as the wood sprang back to its place, might easily escape observation.

A mason was sent for, and the mantel-piece removed. And there, in the *débris* behind it, among dust, plaster, crumbling mortar, and a variety of small papers, which, in the course of years, the crack at first indiscernible, had swallowed—lay Richard's letter.

Just as it was, unread, in the surveyor's presence, Hugh Vivian transferred it to an envelope addressed to Lina: which, with a brief note of explanation, he sealed, and posted forthwith. Then, with many thanks to the friendly young surveyor — who was secretly glad of the opportunity for repairing his mantel-piece!—he started by the next train, back to Marjory.

"Oh, Hugh, my dearest Hugh, if we could only know what is in that letter!" cried Marjory.

She had not long to wait. In a few days she heard from Lina.

Very touching, to Marjory at all events,

despite some pride and rigidity, were Lina's words. As she read them, the tears came hot and fast to her blue eyes.

For Lina was convinced at last. She regretted, she said, her mistake; she would thank Marjory to make known that regret to Mr. Vivian. Richard, writing from his death-bed, had owned himself guilty. His tale corroborated Jessie's. He had married her from a low lodging-house in London, and had lived with her on his stolen hoard, until it was nearly exhausted: then—weary, moreover, of her—he had picked a pretended quarrel, and left her to fend for herself. She did not know, he said, his true name; —unless indeed he had left with her certain papers which he found to be missing, and through which she would learn it. Other adventures were related, ending at length in his engaging himself as a common sailor to work out his passage to the Cape. Thence, if no profitable employment turned up, he had intended to go on to the diggings: but was stopped as we have seen.

The letter was deeply repentant; the fear of death had touched him. He begged his father to advertise for Jessie, to inform her of his death, to supply any needs that she

might have, and to restore her safely—if she were not with her already—to her mother. He had destroyed the marriage certificate, but gave the name of the church, and the date, that a fresh one might be obtained. These particulars Lina copied for Bellhouse.

Finally, as an after thought, Richard had added that the ready exculpation of young Vivian had first suggested to his mind the possibility of imposing on Mr. Bulkley. Hugh's surmise was thus correct. It was, however, but too clear that, had Mr. Bulkley been a less easy victim, some other would have supplied his place; and Lina abstained from any further recrimination.

Richard had disgraced their father's name, she wrote, and caused his death; and she disowned him as a brother. If the boy's surname could be changed from that of Peele to the false one borne by his parents, it would be, she added, a relief to her feelings. She then wished Majrory happiness: and concluded.

A month later she wrote from Albion Square, to ask if she might come for two days to Rockswold. She had been very busy, she said assisting her mother to prepare for the removal which the vicinity of the boy

Russell rendered necessary. They had taken a house in a distant county, and she desired for oldfriendship's sake, to see Marjory once more before her marriage.

So to Rockswold she came; and Marjory was struck by the change in her. Her face looked years older than the face of Gerald's ideal; her beauty, though unimpaired, seemed colder and more rigid: and lines quite new to it, crossed the high, fair forehead. But her manner, though a trifle graver, was otherwise as usual. When she spoke of Hugh Vivian, her tone had yet a certain covert dislike; still she said that she wished him well, and hoped with unmistakable sincerity, that he and Marjory might live long and happily together. Her wedding gift to Marjory was a vignette, beautifully painted, of Gerald, enlarged from a photograph of ordinary size, and richly framed. Seeing Marjory's eyes fill and her lips quiver, in receiving it, she said:

"Marjory, I do not pity you. Every year you will feel more comfort in remembering your brother; every year I hope more completely to forget mine."

So they parted.

Once again, casually, they met, after many

years. Lina was then a Sister of the English Church, head of an orphanage. Still beautiful and stately was the face framed in by the white cap, but set in lines of elevated narrowness—the face of one whose life moves in a groove, ignoring the great world. Still, in that groove, she did much steady work, as the weeks and months, each so like the others, rolled by. On some of those children whom she was ever training, her training doubtless answered well; and they went forth from her to live pure and truthful lives, and do their duty in quiet. But others went forth to practise bigotry, and, where they could, to teach it—scorning alike the rival bigotries, and that freer life where grooves and goodness are not identical.

And some, we may fear, found in the world, hitherto to them a blank letter, charms too powerful to be despised in the wholesale fashion set forth to them; and contradictions impossible to reconcile with that which they had learned as truth: and in the reaction, failing to discriminate, were caught amid varying currents, and wrecked—if not for ever, for this earth at least, with all they held most precious.

But nothing of all this was anticipated by

Lina, as, straight in her course, fixed in her principles, in her confidence in herself and her system, she went serenely on, day by day. What human beings ought to be, this system ought to make them; if it failed, they only were to blame. Had the system in question been that of a Methodist, or even of a Shaker, she would have pursued it, as she pursued her very opposite one—*the* one, —with firmness never varying. Not till hereafter she wakes to find it but a thread of the great rope, will any conception dawn on her, that there are things (of any consequence) in Heaven or on earth, not dreamed of in her philosophy.

CHAPTER XXII.

"Wait: my faith is large in Time,
And that which shapes it to some perfect end."
Tennyson.

It was on an ideal spring day—one of those days in which, however grumbling folk may talk or write, we do still every year rejoice—that Hugh and Marjory were married. Mrs. Stanhope had not wished this event to take place until Marjory was out of mourning; but Marjory's health, formerly so vigorous, had not come unimpaired through the long ordeal of anxiety and sorrow; in the monotonous life at Rockswold, when Hugh was not with her, she drooped; and the doctor who had known her from childhood, advised that the wedding should not be postponed. Marjory secretly suspected that Hugh, who had paid him a private visit, was not wholly without a voice in this counsel; but she kept her suspicions to herself, and made no demur. In her heart she knew that Hugh's presence only, of all earthly things, had power to soothe the sick craving

for Gerald,—which here, in these familiar places haunted, at every turn, by her life-long hopes, at times almost overwhelmed her.

So they were married on a balmy morning in the second week of May. Earth and sky alike were bathed in sunlight, orchards were rich in blossom, bees were humming in the young green of the sycamores, lilacs and syringa scented the air,—when the bride and bridegroom came forth from the gray old church into the new world opening before them. Under other circumstances, Hugh would have taken his wife abroad; but Marjory could not as yet have borne the sight of those longed-for places, scenes of so many aspirations buried in Gerald's early grave. Instead, they went a quiet tour among some of the English lakes. The perfect weather glorified the loveliness at all times beyond words to describe; the proverbial rain was suspended. Since those days Marjory has seen beauty of wider fame; but to her nothing has ever surpassed that first vision of Grasmere, the calm heights rising around the still blue lake, and Rotha's clear stream watering the peaceful spot where, with his people, Nature's great poet sleeps among

the mountains that he loved. She has never quite lost her first impression, as they drove in the spring sunset through the village,—of a little foretaste of that Eden where the ground shall no more be cursed, and perfect blessedness shall reign on earth as in heaven.

Such scenes seem in themselves specially fitted for the healing of minds diseased; and when to their influences was united the constant, watchful devotion of such love as Marjory now found to exist not only in day-dreams,—no wonder that health and mind alike speedily recovered their tone, and the craving, hopeless as painful, left by her loss, died gradually away.

Meanwhile Hugh, who had thought that life, for him, was over; that joy was a chimera —the whole world dead and dry: could only be compared to a person who has been buried by a winter avalanche, and, in summer delivered, finds around him a new universe full of endless beauty, and of delight to which before he was blind. Constantly he felt that had all been as he would have it, in the days of his thoughtless youth, he could never have known such happiness as was lavished on him now. In those days he had had no experience of the deep things of life; he had

skimmed, like a brilliant dragon-fly, along the surface of the waters. A storm had convulsed that surface—black clouds had hidden the sun—he had been swept into dark and fearful places:—now it was over—he had come back into the light:—and all things were changed to him!

One day during their sojourn in the Vale of Keswick, he found in an old book some lines which haunted him long afterwards, as embodying the thought in his heart.

"Blessed Lord, if Thou hadst led me
As I foolishly desired—
All the good I shunned forbid me,
Given all that I required,—
Hadst Thou punish'd me by granting
All that I believ'd was wanting—
Thou alone couldst count the cost
Of the treasure I had lost!"

* * * *

Conclusion.

There was great festivity when the new squire brought his bride home to Thorne, and such a warm welcome as Hugh had never thought to see again. Farmers and cottagers alike rejoiced to see a resident landlord once more among them; and Hugh from his childhood had been a favourite in the place. He

made a far better landlord than would have been possible, had he succeeded his father, in the natural course, at Copelands. Habits of conventional selfishness and luxury had been sternly broken; and in his buffetings about the world, he had learned to realize both sides of many social questions: a discipline of which those dependent on him, reaped now more advantages than one.

Marjory's first pleasurable experience of the benefits of wealth, consisted in placing her kind uncle and his delicate wife beyond the reach of pecuniary anxieties. On the anniversary of their wedding-day, which fell within a week of her own, she sent them, by Hugh's contrivance, a present of certain title-deeds of building property in London, which had been among Mr. Bulkley's possessions,—and which, besides the certainty of yearly increase, more than doubled their present income. The happiness caused by such a gift, in the quiet parsonage where life had so often been a struggle, was only equalled by that of Marjory, in its anticipation.

She had early in her engagement discovered that the anonymous friend who had discharged Gerald's debt, was no other than Hugh himself: disguised beneath that ambi-

guous description which, although in one sense true, had limited their suspicions to Mrs. Wilton's personal friends. Hugh had casually learned, during his intercourse with Gerald, the name of the lawyer to whom the payments were made; and his first act, after Mr. Bulkley's death, had been to ascertain particulars of the sum: and so discharge it.

Marjory would have repaid him from her own small capital; but this he laughed to scorn; and she knew too well the joy of giving to the beloved, to press the point: she was content to owe all to him. Instead, she carried out a suggestion of his own, and sent the few hundreds remaining after the expenses of her quiet wedding and her *trousseau*, to Mr. Harding; in trust for the next poor artist of real talent, who might come in his way. Mr. Harding's answer, accepting the trust, contained also an expression of true sympathy, speaking of Gerald and his genius in terms which Marjory, with a mingling of pride and tears, will remember throughout her future life.

And now she filled the place of the little old lady, as mistress of Thorne. It was her daily prayer to fill it worthily: a prayer ever more abundantly answered, as the years

went by. All the energy, the brightness, the ardour of her nature, found ample scope in her varied duties as lady of the manor. And truly it might be said of her, that "her price was far above rubies; the heart of her husband did safely trust in her; strength and honour were her clothing; she opened her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue was the law of kindness. Her children rose up and called her blessed; her husband also, and he praised her."

Thorne became one of the most popular houses in the neighbourhood. No unnecessary state was maintained there—nothing was done for mere show; but hospitality of all kinds abounded—to the poor no less than to the rich. Its owners had known the sting of poverty; they regarded their wealth as a trust, to be shared with their fellows. It was their aim to minister, not merely to the so-called "poor people;" but also to those of gentle life: devising help, either anonymous, or of such a kind as not to wound the tenderest delicacy. The skill to which, by patient study, they in this respect attained, was wonderful at length! the multitude to whom in the course of years their helping hands were stretched, will not be

known until the day when secrets are revealed.

Marjory's story was published about the time of her marriage; and met with good success. She continued to write at intervals, as she had opportunity: often she was too busy for writing,—and sometimes she acted merely as her husband's secretary. For Hugh still cultivated the gift which his adversity had developed. His reviews and essays had been known as those of an author tinged with scepticism. Now, entering the lists in an opposite direction, he did his umtost to gainsay all that he had ever said unfavourable to Revelation. Replies, bitter as talented, from those with whom he had formerly agreed, were hurled back at him through the press; but the faith which he had won through such sore conflict was never more to be shaken.

To those who, like Hugh and Marjory, have had practical experience of the existence of a living God, the cries for this or that sign of it, are beneath attention. The sometime sick who have proved within themselves the efficacy of a special medicine, carry within themselves the best of answers to theories proclaiming its imposture.

And Bellhouse had no need to leave the house to which she had clung. She stayed on, honoured and beloved, inhabiting her accustomed rooms, keeping up her old habits: the backbone, Marjory often said, of the household. No one could tell over how many trifling difficulties she enabled the young wife to steer safely. Her wisdom and experience were invaluable; and her fidelity to her new master and mistress was no less constant than to the little old lady of yore. Bellhouse is still in every way the same; even in looks she is little altered. She still talks of "The Almighty," and says often, with a thankful countenance, that her trust has not been disappointed. The sun of her days is going down in peace; her boy is all she can desire. Copelands is not, like his mother, ambitious; his highest aspiration is to become Mr. Vivian's steward. He takes kindly to farming and other country pursuits; and it is not improbable that this aspiration will one day be realized.

And there are children once more in Miss Evie's nursery. The eldest is a dark-haired boy, born two years after the marriage. He is the counterpart of his father at his age, —bright, careless, yet passionate. Marjory

trembles a little, sometimes, as she watches him, remembering the stern discipline that his father has had to bear. But she remembers afterwards that, as Bellhouse says, "The Almighty knows best": and puts the future from her.

She has only two other children, twins, three years younger, than their brother. They are a boy and girl, reminding her of Gerald and herself. The boy, too, strangely resembles Gerald, both in appearance and in nature; and she fancies that already he shows signs of artistic talent. She cannot restrain some dreams concerning him, after the fashion of former days; but she does not indulge them too freely. She has learned wisdom since those dreams of her youth.

And Gerald's face, with those gray eyes, so clear and beautiful, hangs where she can see it constantly, by day and by night. Not long ago, she took her children to the house in the College Yard: where Mrs. Myers and Miss Pilkington still reside, amid a new generation of little boys. Suddenly a craving came on her to see once more the old attic which Gerald called his workshop. She got permission; and climbed the well-known stairs.

It looked much as in the time she remembers; dust had gathered thickly on the old boxes,—but they remained still as Gerald had piled them, when he built his easel.

"Mother," says her elder boy, creeping after her. "Is this the place where uncle Gerald used to paint?"

Marjory tries to answer; but the words will not come: her throat swells,—her eyes fill with tears long strange to them. She has turned to the window: there the familiar river flows, with the same rushing sound,—just as she saw and heard it in the days of her passionate girlhood. There beyond, are the meadows—and the Shelburn hills, with the old lights and shades. All is the same. Only Gerald—where is he? Where has he been, through all these silent years?

The child has roamed away again; and the tears, unrestrained, flow faster, blinding her eyes. But suddenly a quick step comes behind her; her husband's arm clasps her waist; his bright kind voice says—

"Marjory! Why are you here alone? You should have told me."

She rests her head upon his shoulder; and the moment of bitterness is past.

"Cometh sunshine after rain,
After mourning joy again;
After heavy bitter grief,
Dawneth surely sweet relief!

Though to-day may not fulfil
All thy hopes, have patience still;
For perchance to-morrow's sun
Sees thy happier days begun.
As God willeth, march the hours,
Bringing joy at last in showers,
And whate'er we asked is ours."

THE END.

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